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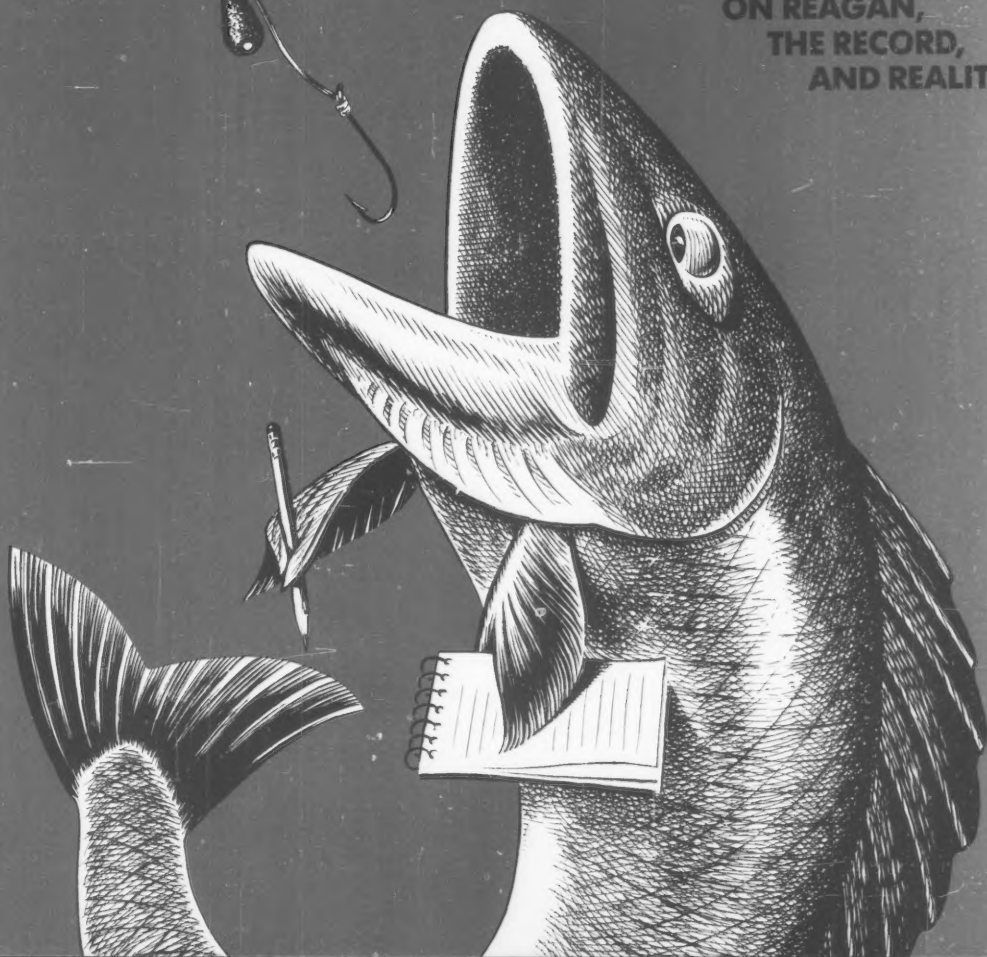
# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1987 • \$9  
NATIONAL MEDIA MONITOR • PRESS/RADIO/TV

On Watch  
in the  
Persian Gulf

## HOW NOT TO COVER A CANDIDATE

JAMES DAVID BARBER  
ON REAGAN,  
THE RECORD,  
AND REALITY



GIL EISNER

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# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

700 JOURNALISM BUILDING, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10027

\* \* \* \* \*  
\* A TIMELY MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER \*  
\* \* \* \* \*

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Best wishes for the holidays,



Osborn Elliott  
Publisher

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## THE MERCEDES-BENZ 190 CLASS: THE DELIGHTFUL PARADOX OF BEING IN A RUSH AND WANTING IT NEVER TO END.

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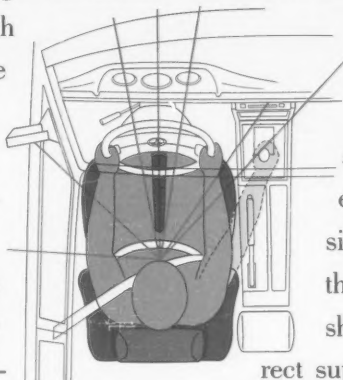
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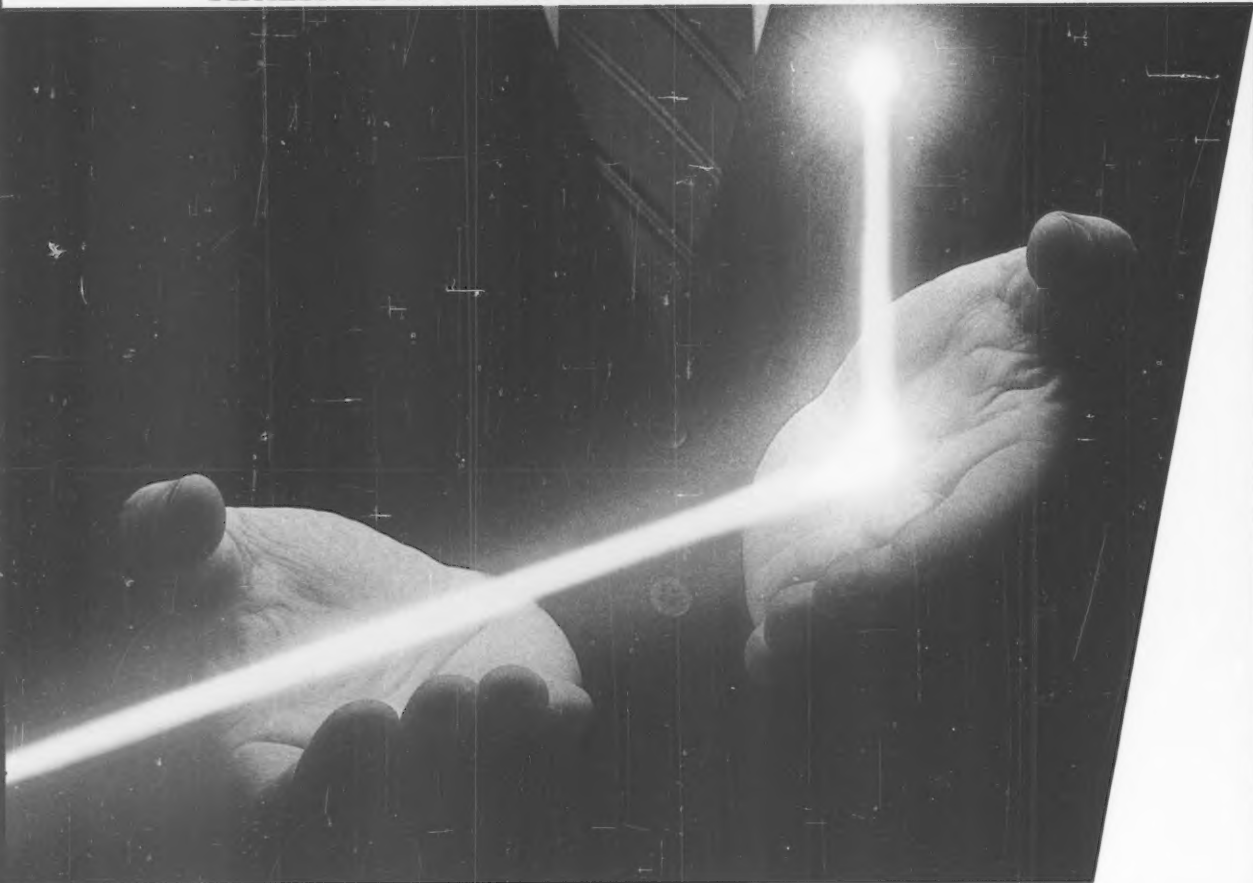
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- To assess the performance of journalism in all its forms, to call attention to its shortcomings and strengths, and to help define — or redefine — standards of honest, responsible service . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent ●

Excerpt from the *Review's* founding editorial, Autumn 1961

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# CHRONICLE

## Radio daze: tuning out the news

After the third pink slip, Patrick Hennessey began to wonder about his career choice.

He had learned to be a radio newsmen at WPKN-FM, an eclectic and serious-minded college station at the University of Bridgeport, in southern Connecticut, and after graduation in 1980 he landed a job at a small station in the middle of the state, WMMW-AM, in Meriden. Three months later the news staff was reduced from two people to one, and Hennessey was out of a job.

He moved to Milford, Connecticut, for a job at WFIF, but eight months later the AM station eliminated its entire news department. In 1981, Hennessey found work at a seemingly more stable station, New Haven's WPLR-FM, a popular rocker with a strong signal. He worked his way up to afternoon anchor before that station decided in 1983 to reduce its four-person news staff to one. (Later, he says, the station added "a couple of comedians" to do the morning news, in line with the "morning zoo" craze that swept through rock stations a couple of years ago.)

Still undaunted, he relocated again, this time to southeastern Connecticut for a post as news director at WNLC-AM in New London, where he went back to covering the school board and the sewer commission. But the pay was low, and, although no one had ever questioned his abilities as a journalist, he began to think about switching professions. "I decided public relations would be a better career, at least in terms of eating weekly and other fringe benefits," he says.

By this time Hennessey had learned that what had seemed like his own bad luck was really the effect of a national trend. Since the Federal Communications Commission deregulated radio six years ago, radio news has been in a sharp decline.

According to a study by University of Missouri journalism professor Vernon A. Stone, an estimated 2,000 full-time positions in radio news were eliminated last year alone, while 700 part-time slots were created. In major markets, Stone reports, the average full-time news staff dropped from a median of 2.7 in 1985 to 1.4 last year. According to a survey of nearly 2,000 radio stations by the National Association of Broadcasters and the Broadcast Financial Management Association, news departments got the smallest slice

of stations' budgets last year, an average of 4.4 percent, compared with 11 percent for advertising and promotion.

Prior to deregulation, radio stations had to use at least 8 percent of their time for non-entertainment programming, a requirement that many big-city stations, especially FM rockers, were loath to fulfill. Station managers contend that listeners don't want their music interrupted. "If you're running a music-oriented station, outside of morning drive, news should be a low priority," says Jeff Rowe, who has worked as a program director for stations in Chicago and Milwaukee. "Ten years ago there were fewer stations in each market. There's stronger competition now for audiences and ad dollars. News, outside of full-service stations, isn't vital anymore."

One faction of news professionals, especially those in management positions who are

adamantly opposed to any return of regulation, contend that the news dearth is a problem of the market that would not be solved by new FCC rules. Ernie Schultz, president of the Radio-Television News Directors Association, argues that the cutbacks have been relatively minor in terms of overall radio news employment, and that the stations that have phased out news tend to be those that were only doing it because they had to. According to Jim Farley, vice-president of radio news at NBC Radio Network, the real culprit is the decline of traditionally news-oriented AM radio. "Yes, there has been a diminution of news, and yes, it's been since deregulation," he says. "But too many people miss the point—that deregulation happened as radio stations, particularly AM stations, have had declining audiences and they've had to make cost cuts. News has been one of the first things to be cut."

Rapid turnover in radio station ownership has exacerbated the problem, Farley adds. "There are a lot of new people in our industry, ranging from sleazy speculators to hungry entrepreneurs to ethical business people," he says. "We've got to make new station owners realize that the news people are unrealized assets, not liabilities awaiting the budget ax."

Indeed, after Los Angeles-based Westwood One agreed to buy Farley's own NBC Radio Network from General Electric Company this summer, the network's venerable Washington news bureau suffered severe ax wounds. Some bureau employees were laid off, others were transferred out of radio, and a third group was moved to Mutual Broadcasting System studios in Arlington, Virginia, where they will still use an NBC Radio Network News signature while also filing reports for Mutual. (Westwood One, which started out as a distributor of recorded rock concerts, bought the Mutual Broadcasting System at the end of 1985.)

Radio journalists complain that the post-deregulation era has also brought about a decline in the quality of radio news. In order to survive in today's climate, news services that depend on radio have branched out to entertainment and soft "life-style" news, and have found ways of packaging hard news into shorter, faster-paced newscasts. The Associated Press radio news network, for example, has added a two-minute "light" *NewsWatch* report and a one-minute *NewsMinute* report, both geared to rock stations, plus *Segue*, a series of one-minute shows on entertainment that started this summer. The trade newsletter *Inside Radio* notes that the coming of life-style news will "eclipse radio journalism even further. . . .



C.J. Randy Enos



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Plainly there will be fewer radio journalists and very ill-defined news departments."

The decline in emphasis on news has not escaped the attention of Congress. In introducing a bill last May that would make "meritorious" public service a requirement for renewal of a broadcast license, Ernest F. Hollings, the South Carolina Democrat who chairs the Senate commerce committee, scored station owners for caring only about the "bottom line of their balance sheets."

Station managers and owners contend that those who want news will seek out news-oriented stations. Tom Cohen, senior counsel to the communications subcommittee of the commerce committee, disagrees: "Most people only listen to a couple of radio stations, and if that's the case and there's no news on the station, then that person's access to news is going to be limited."

The fate of the bill is unclear, and the Justice Department has said it will recommend a veto if it is passed. The issue is not likely to die, however. "The trends are clear," Cohen says. "Each year it's getting a little worse."

John Motavalli

John Motavalli is a managing editor for *Adweek's* special reports on the media, advertising, and marketing.

## Computer power in Providence

As the point man for the *Providence Journal-Bulletin's* aggressive program to buy government computer records, reporter Elliot G. Jaspin may have more government information at his fingertips than any other reporter in the country.

He has only to type a few commands onto a keyboard, for example, to call up all the political contributions made to major Rhode Island elected officials since 1980. A few more strokes and an assist from a computer operator open up land-sale records, state government purchases, municipal payroll files, even the complete criminal-court records of the state for the last ten years.

Over the last two years, the *Journal* has acquired thirty-nine government tapes and, according to John Ullmann, an expert in computer data bases and an assistant managing editor of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the *Journal's* program is the most advanced of its kind. Jaspin, who shared a Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for a retrospective exposé of Jimmy Hoffa's business practices, believes that many news organizations will follow in the *Journal's* footsteps. "I can do in a slow



Andrew Dickerman/Providence Journal-Bulletin

morning what it would take a small army of reporters to do in a year," he says.

Computer journalism has cropped up intermittently at newspapers since at least as far back as 1973, when Donald Barlett and James Steele of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* published a computer-assisted examination of Philadelphia's criminal justice system. Barlett and Steele had to assemble their own computer records from the paper records of 1,374 criminal cases.

The *Journal's* approach—buying existing government computer tapes whenever it can—is yielding results with less effort, not only in investigative work but for beat reporters as well.

One of the paper's more impressive per-

Where we got the idea that something small  
could be powerful.





## CHRONICLE

**Data on demand:**  
*Providence Journal-Bulletin reporter Elliot Jaspin in the tape vault where his newspaper stores government records it buys and uses to develop stories.*

performances followed a school bus crash that had killed three children. After obtaining the names of all 5,000 Rhode Island school bus drivers, the *Journal* learned from its computerized license records that some of the drivers had poor driving records—one had accumulated seventeen driving-related violations—and that one in five of the bus drivers had received at least one summons. A review of the drivers' criminal records found that several had been convicted of drug trafficking and even racketeering. The story, by Jaspin and Maria Miro Johnson, led the state to revamp its hiring standards.

A computer search of the city of Providence's payroll file turned up a patrolman who had earned \$67,000 in salary and over-

time in 1986—more than the police chief and every city official except the mayor. In another story, a comparison of criminal conviction records and FBI crime statistics showed that, in Providence, burglars have only a 2 percent chance of going to jail.

*Journal* investigative reporter Robert Kramer finds the ease of combing through electronic public records "astonishing" compared with the old paper chase. Beat reporters are encouraged to use the bank regularly, and to look for computerized records to add to the paper's growing library.

The program's backers concede that the data base is useless without solid reporting and clear thinking. Several editors are critical of a *Journal* report last year that compared prosecutions launched by a former attorney general with those initiated by her predecessor. The computer had spat out a perplexing mix of statistics, and the final story seemed to contribute little to public understanding.

One bug in the program is the friction that has developed between the news department and the newspaper's systems department, which at one time ran the government tapes on the *Journal's* mainframe computer. The systems department recently tried to bar Jaspin from programming; computer engineer Peter J. Scheidler believes that reporters

often waste his department's resources by engaging in fishing expeditions.

What information the paper acquires is another concern. In the pre-computer age, many of the records the paper now can call up, though legally open to scrutiny, were practically impossible to gather and analyze. Today, although the paper only seeks records that it regards as clearly public and restricts access to the data it collects, the *Journal* risks being thought of as Big Brother.

Government officials and others have not always agreed with the *Journal's* view of what constitutes a public record. The paper has had to go to court three times to obtain computerized information. In one suit, the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation claimed that the *Journal's* request for computer records would violate the privacy of its clients, even though the mortgage records for each town were on file locally. A judge rejected that argument.

Later, analysis of the tapes showed that the agency had been giving low-interest-rate mortgages to the sons and daughters of local politicians, and the *Journal* had a story.

Karl Stark

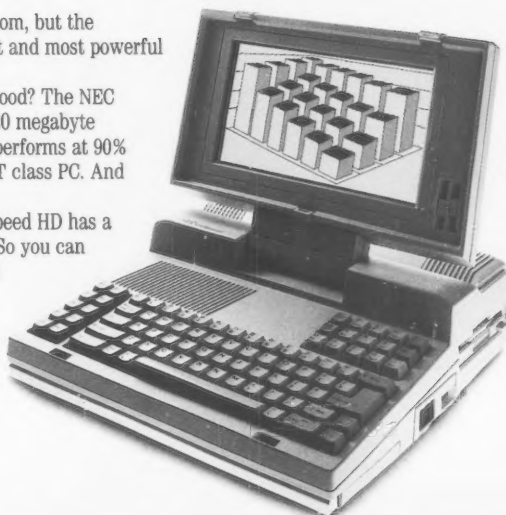
Karl Stark covers politics for *The Record* in Bergen County, New Jersey.

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## An island full of subversives

As a respected journalist who helped break open a political murder scandal involving Puerto Rico's intelligence police—the infamous Cerro Maravilla (Marvel Mountain) affair that shook the island in the early 1980s—Manny Suárez of *The San Juan Star* is used to covering tough cops.

These days, he's wondering how long the cops have been covering him. How, he wonders, could an intelligence officer quoted recently in a right-wing magazine reel off a little-known dollar figure in a civil court case Suárez's wife had lost? Why did he know it? What else does he know—and about whom?

"It's got me a bit concerned," Suárez says. "The concern is not so much for me, but how does it affect others? How does it affect my children, my wife, my friends?"

There are grounds for this kind of wariness these days in Puerto Rico, where the rights of more than three million residents are, in theory at least, protected by their American citizenship and by their own far-reaching, liberal constitution. In June, a former intelligence agent (who had recently pleaded guilty to conspiracy and perjury in the Cerro Maravilla case) mentioned in a radio interview that the police intelligence division maintains a "subversives" list, something many Puerto Ricans had long suspected.

The agent's remark ballooned into a major controversy that is still far from over. The island's House of Representatives petitioned the government to tell the house who was listed and why. Then, Governor Rafael Hernández-Colón admitted in an interview with *United Press International* that not only did the files exist, but that intelligence agents had wasted time collecting "irrelevant, unnecessary information about thousands of people who have done nothing criminal." Next, the government's Civil Rights Commission held weeks of hearings on the topic.

It is the sheer size and scope of the subversives files that draws so much attention. They reportedly contain some 100,000 names, a number equivalent to about 3 percent of the island's population (although some people listed are probably dead). The intelligence division has asked for extra time to turn over its records to a judge because of the staggering amount of information—reportedly 16,500 dossiers, another 74,000 electronic entries, plus fifty file cabinets and four cartons of intelligence material yet to be inventoried. A court order in September gave the government six months to turn the files over to the people listed, although legal chal-

lenges and logistics could drag the process out.

Fear of subversion is not mere political paranoia in Puerto Rico. This spring, William Webster, former head of the FBI, said that ten of the seventeen incidents of terrorism in the U.S. recorded by the agency during 1986 occurred in Puerto Rico, where they were carried out by separatist groups. But the island's history is also rich in persecution of advocates of independence. One fear is that the intelligence division, operating under its own rules, blurs the distinction between government critics and enemies of the state.

Who and what are in the files is still secret, although there has been a great deal of speculation. One person who is aware of the illegal filing system is Sam Dash, the Georgetown University law professor who gained prominence in the 1970s as chief counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee. Dash was hired by Governor Hernández-Colón in 1985 to help reform intelligence gathering on the island in the aftermath of Cerro Maravilla. "It's the kind of thing you and me wouldn't want anybody to keep on you or me," he says. "It might be 'X went to lunch with Y, who is a person of a different political party,' or 'X sat next to Y on an airplane'—all that kind of nonsense. There's no indication a person did anything wrong. It's just this kind of gossip and rumor."

One group apparently well represented on the lists is journalists, which worries Judith Berkan, a professor of constitutional law at Puerto Rico's Inter American University. "The purpose of these lists is not any legitimate law enforcement purpose. The purpose is to intimidate people and make people understand that they should not engage in certain questioning of the government or they



Farah Rivera/The San Juan Star



CJR/Rocio Sabalones

**Spying on the citizenry:** Police "subversive" files (left) arrive in San Juan; Reporter Manny Suárez (above) is among the likely targets of surveillance.

will appear on a list," she says. "It would be very difficult for journalists to carry out their function under these circumstances."

"Some journalists have been threatened or felt threatened," says Yolanda Velez-Arceley, a television journalist and the former president of the Puerto Rican Journalists Association. "Sometimes I think the system has tried to neutralize our job." She and other journalists say their work goes on, regardless

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## CHRONICLE

of who might be watching. Some, in fact, are amused at the prospect of being branded subversive. Others take the threat seriously.

*Claridad*, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party newspaper, published a list of about 1,000 names of prominent Puerto Ricans who are supposedly in the files. That list included more than twenty former or current journalists, including Manny Suárez. The Associated Press, quoting an unnamed high-ranking police official, said the files include fifteen journalists.

Suárez, a reporter in Puerto Rico since 1960, is not alone in thinking that number is low. Reporters who openly advocate Puerto Rican independence feel the most threatened by police surveillance—real or imagined, Suárez says. Intelligence agents have bragged to him about how quickly they can open files on *independentistas*.

"In my case I'm not even an *independentista*," he says. "That's the funny part. Know why I'm on the list? Because I believe every *independentista* has civil rights." Suárez's stories helped break Cerro Maravilla—a case in which police shot and killed two young political radicals in July 1978 near transmission towers used by the U.S. Navy, the FBI, and agencies of the Puerto Rican government (see "Puerto Rico's Rising Star," *CJR*, July/August 1981). The police were at first praised as heroes, but further investigation revealed evidence of ambush and cover-up.

The controversy over the intelligence files may lead to reform. A former president of the Puerto Rican Bar Association has won a court ruling that declares unconstitutional the practice of keeping files not linked to criminal investigations. And there have been several proposals to radically alter intelligence procedures.

Government secrecy is entrenched in Puerto Rico, but the subversives-file controversy has given fresh momentum to a freedom-of-information law that would set up a procedure to make government documents public. A bill has passed the island's senate, and the house will consider it next session.

Journalists are skeptical about the bill's final shape, but its backers are hopeful. "The public mood is different right now," says Francisco Aponte-Pérez, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee in Puerto Rico. "[Many Puerto Ricans] still believe in the principle that you have to run a closed government, but this is changing."

*Barbara Cornell*

*Barbara Cornell, a former reporter for The Kansas City Star, is a free-lance writer who lives in San Juan.*



*Stephen Fybish, meteorology maven*

## The man who does something about the weather

Stephen Fybish has just found another one. Sitting in a corner booth at an Upper West Side diner in Manhattan, he skims *The New York Times's* weather page, circling errors with a pencil. "See what's wrong here?" he asks, sliding the paper across the table. "Look what they've done to Boston. They have the yesterday's high at 81 degrees and the low at 12 degrees. Obviously a typo."

Call it a hobby, a passion, an obsession, whatever, but for over ten years now Fybish has been combing through the *Times's* daily weather reports searching for just such mistakes. Usually he finds two or three a week—most of them simple typos like the Boston mixup—and almost always, he says, he makes sure the *Times* hears about them. "I have a very highly developed sense of mathematical accuracy," he explains. "Particularly when it comes to weather. It's important to me that they get it right."

When the paper doesn't, virtually every error gets recorded in Fybish's collection of weather notebooks. Flip back to November 24, 1985, for instance, and there, in Fybish's microscopic scrawl, you'll find a listing for Reno, Nevada, of 323 degrees. Or September 5, 1980, the day the *Times*, through a mathematical error, reported the driest summer on record. "I knew immediately that it was wrong," he says. "It was really a rather typical summer, 10.3 inches of rainfall over three months." Or last September 26: Key

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In fact, there is no such thing as an all-American plane. Over 30% of the Boeing 767 mainframe comes from outside America. So does 17% of the McDonnell Douglas MD-80, with parts from as far away as the People's Republic of China.

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West, 2 degrees.

"He's a weather nut," says William P. Luce, a *Times* news editor. "But we do take him seriously. He calls fairly often—two or three times a month—and he's caught a number of errors. Apparently he really knows his stuff. When he calls up, we'll definitely check into it. Usually it turns out he's right."

Fybish wouldn't describe himself as eccentric—he prefers "strongly enthusiastic"—but any way you cut it the man is clearly crazy about the climate. Idly mention an ominous cloud in the sky and he's off on a lengthy exegesis of low pressure systems and approaching warm fronts. He's brought with him a shopping bag filled with enough maps and charts and almanacs to stock a small-sized weather station. He knows what the high temperature was in New York on the September day in 1936 when he was born (73 degrees).

"My interest in weather obviously isn't just in finding mistakes," he says. "I have a broad interest in weather patterns, weather history, weather and psychology. I'm sure a lot of people out there share my interest. But for some reason weather tends to get browbeaten as a subject by the press—it's not covered very well. I think it deserves a better break."

A waiter brings him a chocolate ice cream soda and, between spoonfuls, Fybish continues his discourse. "You'd think it'd be easy to avoid these sorts of mistakes," he says. "I mean, most of them are so obvious." He recalls how last June the *Times* ran nearly identical weather statistics three days in a row. "I called them up and asked, 'Doesn't anybody over there read this thing? Aren't there any actual people looking at it?'" The call ultimately resulted in a printed correction. "My greatest triumph," he says.

The *Times* isn't Fybish's only quarry—he has placed occasional calls to the *New York Post*, the *Daily News*, and a small assortment of New York radio and television stations—but it is by far his favorite. "There's a certain satisfaction in tweaking the *Times*," he confesses. "They have this reputation to uphold." Also, he adds, "They print the most weather information, so they make the most mistakes."

In appearance, if not necessarily demeanor, Fybish resembles the proverbial Mad Scientist—wild gray hair worn below his ears, a perceptible paunch, thick horn-rim glasses hung low on his nose (one lens at the moment a bit smudged with chocolate ice cream soda). The appearance is deceptive: he has a master's degree in education

from Columbia University, has been married ten years, and has worked most of the last twenty-five years as a substitute social studies teacher. His fantasy, naturally, is to be a TV weatherman. "But I'm not sure I have the technical knowledge," he sighs. "Besides, I have this fear of putting myself on the line."

*Benjamin Svetkey*

*Benjamin Svetkey is a free-lance writer who lives in New York.*

## Field & freebie

When Florida's Disney World offered media representatives invitations to a lavish multimillion dollar weekend of festivities last year, some 2,500 of them let Disney foot the bill. Travel writing has always been based in part on the generous distribution of freebies, but such crowding at the trough by the journalists in the herd was a shock. "I guess Disney knows more about the ethics of the press than I do," said Michael G. Gartner, who was president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors at the time.

If he was taken aback at the doings in Florida, Gartner might have fainted dead

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**The Times-Picayune**  
**Watch for Us.**

away at the national conference of the Outdoor Writers Association of America, in Kalispell, Montana, last June. He could have watched writers and photographers line up for bags full of free merchandise, such as knives, fishing lures, duffel bags, and bug repellent, or watch them getting ready for some 250 free or reduced-price trips, supplied by Montana guides, outfitters, and resort operators.

All of this is standard procedure in the field of outdoor writing. The 1,800-member association, in fact, gives the practice of taking freebies its blessing in a written code of ethics governing relationships between manufac-

turers and "outdoor communicators": "A member may accept accommodations, travel, meals, or other related services if there is a reasonable expectation of a salable story resulting."

The code goes on to say that members shall not agree to give favorable publicity as a means of obtaining the goods and services. There is no doubt, though, that the manufacturers, tourism offices, service companies, and airlines that provide the largess are looking for good ink. Steve Shimek, who as publicity coordinator for the Montana Travel Promotion Division lined up the free trips at the Kalispell conference, expects the result-

ing stories to generate between \$5 million and \$8 million in business for his tourist-hungry state. "Our goal is not to buy the writer," he says. "Our goal is to get Montana in those national magazines." Editors like the system too, particularly the free travel. "It makes it possible for us to get major stories that would probably otherwise be unavailable to us," says Vin T. Sparano, executive editor of *Outdoor Life*.

The number of outdoor magazines is approaching 300 now, ranging from big ones, like *Sports Afield* or the two-million-circulation *Field & Stream*, down to small publications specializing in, say, shotguns or bass fishing. The magazines' staff writers are often allowed to accept the gifts and discounts offered to free-lancers. Even the larger magazines tend to have small staffs, and editors say that from a third to half of their stories come from free-lancers.

Writers say the freebies help to compensate for story fees that are on the chintzy side. A feature in one of the major outdoor magazine generally brings \$1,000 to \$1,500, and stories that run only regionally might fetch \$250 to \$500. The small single-interest magazines pay less. Some magazines pay only on publication, and expense money is rare. Much of the work is done on speculation. "In our field, it's difficult to make a living without some help from some people along the way," says George Harrison, nature editor of *Sports Afield*.

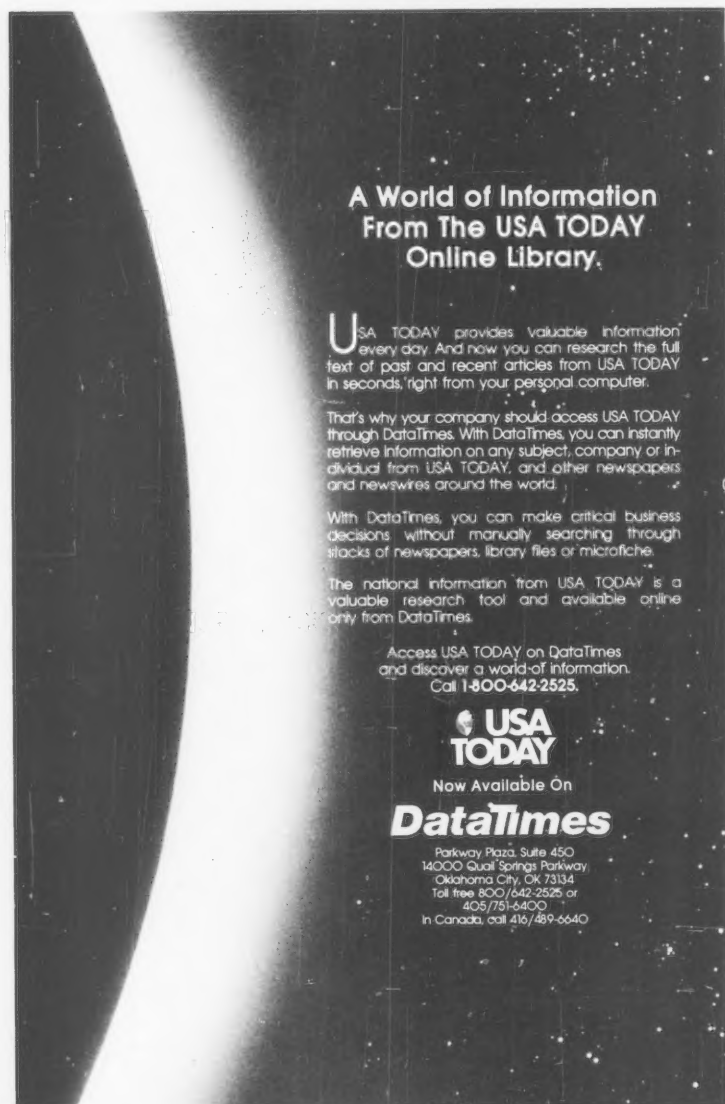
Norman Strung, who writes a monthly column for *Field & Stream*, the largest outdoor publication, has had plenty of help. He has hunted Egyptian geese and impala in South Africa, battled sailfish on light tackle in Panama, and fished for piranha and tracked the eared dove in Colombia. Rarely does he lay down money for an airplane ticket.

Like other outdoor writers and editors, Strung sees his job as much different from that of the hard-news reporter in that there is no "adversarial" relationship between writer and subject. "In outdoor journalism, a guy wants to tell his story. There is a sense of cooperation between a writer and his source," he says. "There is really no way to compromise a story about good trout fishing."

But Casey Bukro, a *Chicago Tribune* reporter and principal author of the ethics code of the Society of Professional Journalists, won't bite. Accepting gifts, he says, "tends to be a messy practice. The public in general doesn't get something for nothing, and journalists are supposed to represent the public."

James E. Larcombe

James E. Larcombe covers the Flathead Valley for the Missoula, Montana, Missoulian.



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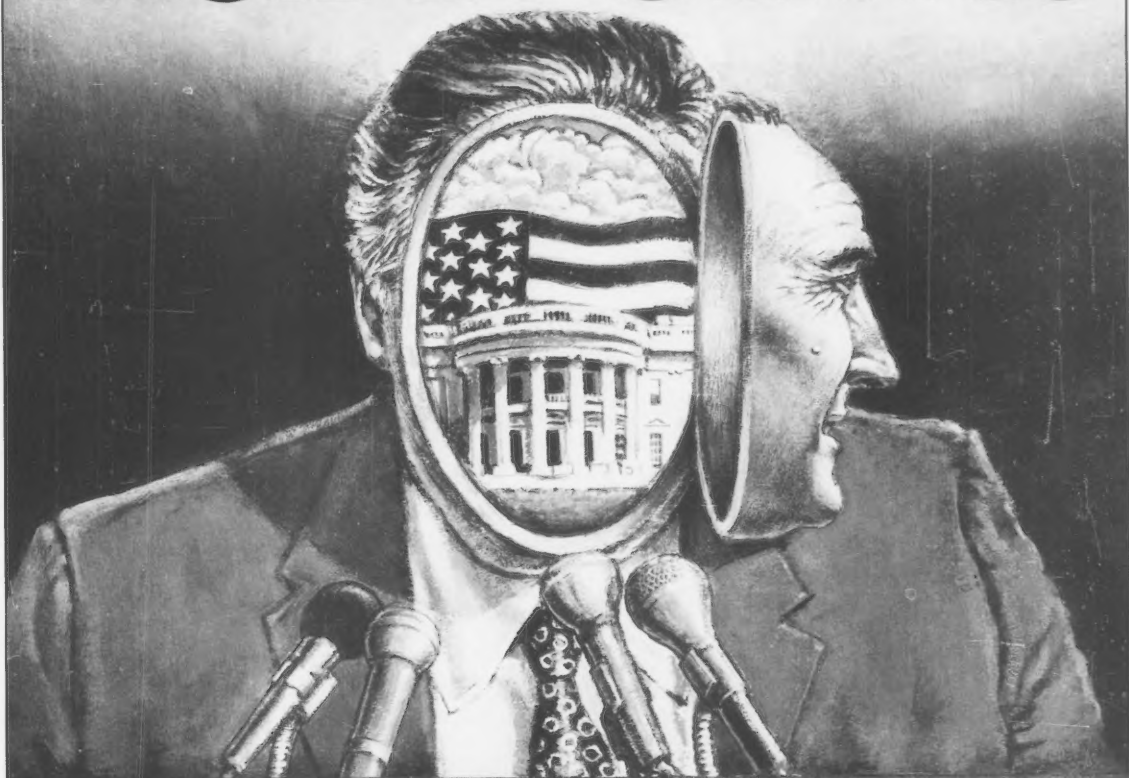
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## Why everybody's watching Gillett

In the spring of 1984, Nashville television station WSMV began an investigation into the sanitary conditions at a local meat-packing plant. A hard-hitting story ran in August, but not before it had jangled a few nerves. Not only was the story almost certain to result in the loss of one of WSMV's largest advertisers, Baltz Brothers Packing Company—which did, in fact, pull out—but it

would put pressure on an industry in which the station's owner, George Gillett, has a major stake.

Gillett did not interfere. Under his direction, in fact, WSMV has built a solid reputation among journalists. The station has added some two dozen reporters since Gillett bought it in 1981, and it has emphasized investigative and in-depth reporting. Last

year, for example, it ran seventy-seven multi-segment series. Besides raking in a number of top journalism awards, the station has consistently won the ratings race in Nashville. Gillett—who owns a pair of ski resorts in Colorado, along with his meat-packing and broadcast properties—contends that no business should be run strictly for profit. "Quality will in and of itself generate profit," he says.

Today, the Gillett Group's commitment to news is much more significant than it was in 1984, when Nashville was its largest station. When the regulatory dust settles from its most recent round of acquisitions, the group will reach 13 percent of the nation's television homes, more than are reached by any other chain of network-affiliated stations apart from the three major networks themselves. (Two groups of independent stations, Fox Television Stations Inc. and Tribune Broadcasting Co., are slightly larger.) Gillett and its partner, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co., are completing the acquisition of six of the seven Storer Communications Inc. stations—in Boston, Detroit, Cleveland, Atlanta, San Diego, and Milwaukee. Other recent acquisitions include stations in Tampa, Baltimore, and several smaller markets. To comply with the Federal Communications Commission's twelve-station limitation on ownership, Gillett is spinning off some of its smaller stations into a blind trust.

Media analysts are watching to see how the burgeoning company fares in the huge markets it is entering, and journalists are watching to see if George Gillett's high-minded philosophy holds up in the major leagues. The company says its first priority has been to improve day-to-day reporting, and at stations it has owned for a while there is evidence to back up that claim. "They've made quantum leaps," says Dan Spaulding, news director at WOTV in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which competes with WWMT, a station Gillett bought in 1985. "You'd have a tough time realizing that the station today is the same station which [Gillett] took over."

Bob Selwyn, a Gillett executive, says that fifty-five additional positions have been added since 1981 to the news staffs of the three large and three smaller stations that the Gillett group will operate along with the more recently acquired Storer stations. At KSBW-TV in Salinas, California, for example, which Gillett acquired eleven months ago, local news time has increased from one and a half hours to three hours per day, while the

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news staff has increased by 50 percent. Michael Kronley, the station's news director, says that a year ago a reporter might have had four stories per day. Now the average load is a main story and a sidebar, which allows a reporter to cover a topic more thoroughly. Before Gillett took over KSBY-TV in San Luis Obispo, California, at the end of last year, reporter Eric Spillman acted as his own camera operator at the one-person Santa Maria bureau and drove his tapes forty miles to the station himself. Now reporters and photographers at the four-person bureau send their stories to San Luis Obispo via a new microwave link.

The company pushes its journalistic philosophy through its corporate news group, consisting of four corporate-level journalists who travel from station to station critiquing stories, conducting seminars, and helping news directors organize the newsroom. One of the corporate group's mandates is to make coverage, in George Gillett's words, "proactive" rather than "reactive," anticipating the problems and interests of the community. "Our priorities are shifting away from events to issues," says Jim West, news director at WTVT in Tampa, which is jointly owned by Gillett and Clarence McKee. "Instead of covering city council meetings ad nauseam,

you consider the issue that will be covered by the board in two months." Since Gillett entered the picture in June, early evening news at WTVT has been increased to two hours a day, one and a half hours more than viewers get from the other two network affiliates in Tampa.

Along with Gillett's "proactiveness" has come an emphasis on series reporting—giv-

**'They've made quantum leaps,' says a Michigan competitor. 'You'd have a tough time realizing that the station today is the same station which Gillett took over.'**

ing reporters and viewers an extended look at a subject. Gil Buettner, news director at WOKR in Rochester, New York, says that since Gillett took over three years ago, the number of series the station does has almost doubled, and that at the urging of his owners

he now formulates series topics four or five months ahead of time to allow reporters, rotated out of general assignment, to plan their stories far in advance.

Gillett officials say that once day-to-day reporting is up to company standards, investigative teams will begin to appear. The corporate group has already constructed three models for investigative units, setting out guidelines and cost estimates for different size markets. A typical team in a large city would have three to five full-time people and a budget of about \$400,000 a year.

Investigative reporters at other stations around the country will withhold their applause until they see results, but they are rooting for Gillett. "If they succeed [in setting up good investigative teams], it could have a major impact on the industry," says Don Fitzpatrick, a television news headhunter based in San Francisco. "Stations competing directly with Gillett are going to sit down and say, 'We can't allow them to steal this franchise [investigative reporting]. Come budget time, they'll invest in it.'"

David Weller

David Weller, a former CJR intern, is editor of *The Spectator*, the student paper of Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan.

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## Berlin TV: the beat picks up

Jeanette Enders opens the studio door with a mighty shoulder pop. In her right hand she clutches her script and in her left she holds a makeup compact and hair brush. She plops into a chair and flips open her mirror, checking her blonde hair. Thirty seconds until air.

On her right is Gerhard Lenz, stately, middle-aged, hair graying in just the right spots. Lenz is all business as he proofreads his script, underlining key words and phrases. Behind the two is a giant picture of the city's skyline, framed by turquoise and silver squares. The camera dollies into position. Five seconds until air.

In the booth upstairs, news director Gert Ellinghaus is screaming at his minions to stand by. "Three-two-one," he yells. "Spin theme music. Roll animation. Go." A flurry of drums, a chorus of trumpets, and the title of the newscast flies across the screen, looping twice before it locks into position at the center of the frame.

This could be Washington or New York. Given the way consultants have molded newscasts across the U.S., it could be the evening news in Fresno or Cedar Rapids. But this is the popular *Berliner Abendschau*. The

words may be in German, but to an American TV reporter it all looks hauntingly familiar.

At one time the BBC was the only role model for television news in Europe. On the one hand that meant excellent journalism and first-rate documentaries. But the BBC is also often staid and dull. Today, while the BBC is still much admired, many German stations have their newsroom monitors tuned to Cable News Network. German society, which has adopted American-style politics, is beginning to embrace American-style television news.

Walk into news director Ellinghaus's office and you can tell he's fond of American images. On the wall is a floor-to-ceiling poster of James Dean. His clothes are strictly Hugo Boss, the German designer popularized by *Miami Vice*. Ellinghaus calls the shots at Sender Freies Berlin, SFB-TV.

In his attempt to liven up the local newscast he has enjoyed some victories and suffered some defeats. He talked management into buying a paint box—an expensive electronic gizmo that will allow parts of his newscast to look like the stylized opening to *Saturday Night Live*—but union engineers



CURTIS LEHMAN

**Up-tempo:** Gert Ellinghaus of Berlin's SFB-TV is among the German news directors pushing to put U.S.-style pizzazz into staid German TV news.

have refused to learn how to use it. "I will win," the director says with a wild grin. "I will win. I will drive them crazy before they drive me mad."

Ellinghaus's supporters say he is merely

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## CHRONICLE

improving the look and pace of the news. "Tempo is the word in English," says German network correspondent Erhard Thomas. "Local news has for too long been too slow." Another of Ellinghaus's backers is SFB-TV reporter Christine Kolmar, who picked up an admiration for American TV news while studying at Stanford. "Reporters in the United States tend to be tougher. Their stories also look better," she says. "We tend to be too nice." Not everybody likes the changes, however. There is a fear that along with American-style visual razzle will come American fluff and glitz.

In some ways, of course, German TV news will remain distinctly German. If she worked in the U.S., for example, Kolmar, who is intelligent and attractive, would be a natural anchor. But anchors in Germany—or moderators, as they are called—are not journalists; they are news readers and nothing more. The public sees journalists as too opinionated to be anchors, even though the anchors read what journalists have written. A few years ago ARD Television, a national network, talked about using journalists as anchors, but some newspaper columnists were fiercely opposed. One reason is that in Germany, television journalists, as well as television management, have a tradition of close affiliation with political parties. And since SFB-TV is a public television station, the party in power has a great deal of influence when it comes to filling management slots and picking star reporters. Kolmar would not mind being a moderator, but she is blocked, not only because journalists are perceived as being too political, but also, ironically, because she is not affiliated with a political party.

Jeanette Enders, by contrast, is a perfect German anchor. Along with her news-reading duties, she has a lucrative modeling career, which she has no intention of giving up. Her co-anchor, Lenz, is a popular host of vacation cruises.

On this night's show, Lenz and Enders are reading a blend of hard news and features, spicing up the transitions with a bit of U.S.-style chat. The lead is a story about housing shortages, with the focus on the recent efforts of the Berlin city council to solve the problem. Other stories include a dry BBC-style piece, narration over tape of an archaeological dig of the long-buried Gestapo headquarters, and a U.S.-style piece, featuring a reporter following a piece of mail through each step in a new overnight Express Mail-type delivery service—an important lifeline for Berlin.

While German TV has adopted American production values, it has largely rejected the

news formula of local TV in the U.S. Crime, for instance, is conspicuously absent. In part, this is because the crime rate in Berlin is much lower than in major U.S. cities; in part, because Germans, particularly reporters, find crime stories trivial and distasteful. A week earlier SFB-TV had run footage of police recovering a drowning victim from a local lake—standard fare for many American newscasts; in Berlin the station received hundreds of complaints. Everyone concerned admitted that showing the tape had been a mistake.

Instead of juicy crime stories, SFB-TV's viewers get a heavy diet of politics, international news, and coverage of the three allied powers—the U.S., Great Britain, and France—that administer the city. One reason politics dominates local and national newscasts on German TV is that each station is administered by a board consisting of community leaders, including local politicians and church officials. And, while there may be no commercial or ratings pressure to shape the news, as there is in the U.S., political pressure is not so rare. "There is always this political sword of Damocles—'we'll take the money away,'" says Michael Schmunk, a former press official with the German embassy in Washington.

After the newscast ends at 7:45, Ellinghaus has his troops gather around for the nightly postmortem. He is wearing a scowl and lamenting the fact that SFB-TV does not have the capabilities to go live during the newscast. "Look what they do in Washington," he yells. "Live, two or three times a night. We could do that too."

On the other side of the table, the producers nod their heads in agreement. At the back of the room, the engineers are shaking their heads no. They long for the days before Ellinghaus, when the newscast was locked in by 1:30, with no last-minute changes, no fancy graphics, no innovation.

Ellinghaus rests his head in his hands, his visions of swirling live shots and dancing graphics temporarily derailed. But time is on his side. The engineers know it, and so do the few members of his news staff who have been resisting his plans.

He doesn't have to worry much about what local advertisers will buy. There is no ratings system to send him packing after a bad report. He is a civil servant. After all, he says with a wink as we walk out of the building, some things about German television should never be changed.

*Scott Klug*

*Scott Klug, the investigative reporter for WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C., was a fellow of The American Council on Germany.*



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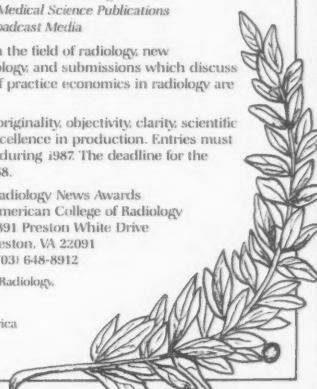
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# CAPITAL LETTER

by WILLIAM BOOT

## Hustling the folks back home

It was certainly a novel news lead — a childlike sketch of a smiling face and a message in photocopied longhand: "Thought you'd be interested in the attached. [signed] Rudy." Then came a typed report on a tax reform move that "drew strong support from Senator Rudy Boschwitz."

Given prevailing congressional standards, this mass mailing to Minnesota constituents was a bit too subdued. It was smarmy and ingratiating enough, but it was only one page long and it did not carry a single photograph of the senator.

Most congressional newsletters are "advertisements for myself" that would make even a Norman Mailer blush. Taken together, they portray a world in which one individual — your senator or representative — makes a difference day after day, struggles valiantly against abuse of the elderly, toils to reunite missing children with their parents, and defends to the death the right of

American mothers to bake chocolate chip cookies. These newsletters (I've reviewed recent offerings of some thirty members of Congress, paying particular attention to the Senate's output) are a kind of "savior journalism" in which the reporter is hero. They come with headlines like these:

WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS (Senator Jay Rockefeller);

WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIA'S FUTURE (Senator Robert Byrd);

STILL FIGHTING — HOLLINGS INTRODUCES NEW TRADE BILL.

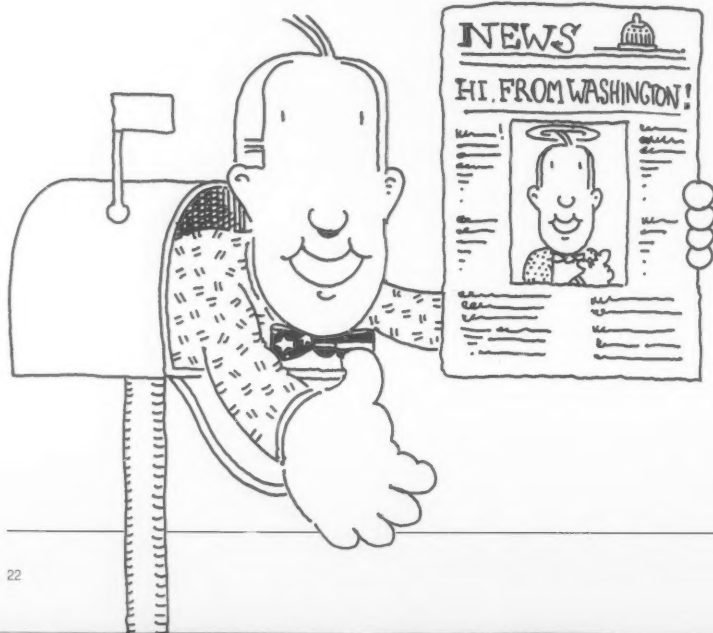
Such missives might lack detachment and objectivity, but there is one thing about them that struggling newspaper publishers must envy: the public has no choice about subscribing but still ends up footing the bill — some \$70 million a year shelled out to support Congress's free-postage, or franking, habit.

Some congressional newsletters contain useful information, such as a recent pamphlet explaining how elderly people

can avoid overpayment under the new tax law. A few are entertaining. Senator Daniel Moynihan's, for instance, are a pleasure to read — witty, erudite, intelligent, informative. But the senior senator from New York is the PBS of congressional newsletter writers. Many of his colleagues' efforts are like Crazy Eddie ads on the *Late, Late Show*. Their contents can be broken down into four main categories:

● Taking credit. There are three basic gambits here. Members can take credit for something specific (e.g., Senator William Roth, of Delaware, recently reported receiving a "Golden Bulldog" award from a lobby group for his budget-slashing votes; Senator Boschwitz reprinted an editorial from a home-state paper terming him "The Lone Eagle . . . [a] spirit of the American Revolution"). They can claim kudos for a more general trend, as did New York's Senator Alfonse D'Amato: "In 1981, we were in the grip of the worst crime wave in our Nation's history. . . . I pledged to you that I would work hard for tougher criminal laws. . . . Working with my Senate colleagues, I have kept [that] promise. . . . By last year the number of crimes had been reduced by 14 percent."

Or, by "targeting" specific constituent interest groups in separate mailings, they can even take credit for achievements that appear self-contradictory — without antagonizing anyone. Virginia Senator Paul Trible, for instance, recently sent out mailings to police officers stating that he backed legislation to ban ballistic knives (which can be shot from a spring-loaded weapon) and armor-piercing bullets, both of which can penetrate bulletproof vests. But after telling the police in one mailing that laws banning weapons were essential to protect law-enforcement officers, he suggested



CUR/Kimble Mead





# Would you apply?

**N**ot likely. Not if you're a college graduate who could start in another field at what a teacher earns after 15 years on the job.

That's why America desperately needs teachers. One million teachers between now and 1990. By every measure, we're going to be several hundred thousand short.

Imagine if we were talking about a shortage of physicians and surgeons. A massive teacher shortage has just as serious consequences on our society. Who will be there to prepare future generations to enter all the professions if there aren't enough teachers to do the job?

Shortages already exist all across this country, because for years college students in droves have chosen not to become teachers. In 1967, 22% of all college freshmen planned on teaching. By 1985 only 6% of the students polled said they wanted to teach.

What keeps college students from wanting to be teachers?

First and foremost, pay.

Right now there are four million Americans certified to teach who aren't in the classroom. And one-quarter of all education graduates decided never to seek teaching jobs. Countless more considered education but decided not to make it their major.

America has lost a generation of teachers. To fill in the gaps, schools are using teachers out of the fields of expertise or uncertified teachers to make sure classrooms aren't empty. This severely hurts the education process and masks the severity of the teacher shortage.

In a recent Gallup poll, commissioned by the NEA, 80% of the American people favor higher teacher salaries. Almost half of those surveyed—41%—said they are willing to pay higher taxes to see that teachers are paid properly.

Americans want it. America desperately needs it.

Qualified teachers, paid professional wages. So that becoming a teacher is once again a respected and valued choice.

**nea**

**The Subject is Excellence.**

to firearms buffs in another mailing that such measures were ineffective and should not be implemented: "I have always believed that stiff criminal penalties are the best means of resolving the problems of gun-related crime."

● Sucking up to voters. Many members sign newsletters with only their first names. Most recount their visits home for town meetings ("I recently traveled the length and breadth of our great state" — Senator Steven Symms, of Idaho; "I've traveled the length and width of Illinois" — Senator Paul Simon; "I have been traveling the length of our state" — Senator Lawton Chiles, of Florida, a state not noted for its width). And they often describe what a stirring experience it was ("THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME!!! . . . I feel a great chemistry with the people during these meetings" — Senator Jeremiah Denton, of Alabama).

● Stoking good feelings. Congressional newsletters are a cornucopia of upbeat leads ("Good news!" — Rhode Island Senator John Chafee; "Great news for federal workers!" — Senator Tribble; "Some things do have a happy ending" — Senator Chiles). They are stuffed with warmhearted moments. North Dakota Senator Mark Andrews replied in his "Andrews' Mailbag" to a letter from schoolchildren: "It's hard to say no when someone asks so nicely. The third grade at Franklin School is getting the letter and picture they asked for and I'm making plans to drop in for a visit. . . ." Jeremiah Denton, who lost his Senate seat in 1986, described in a pre-election mailing how his wife christened the missile cruiser *Mobile Bay*: "*Mobile Bay* and Jane are a perfect couple. . . . Jane [was] a real, honest-to-goodness Navy wife for 31 years."

● Hanging tough on motherhood. Members take firm stands on topics such as Soviet espionage, child pornography, and sexual abuse. They're against them. "Frankly," wrote Chiles in one recent mailing, "I find crack cocaine a frightening drug."

Congress justifies franked newsletters as official business aimed at educating the citizenry. Of course, the official business of Congress is politics. Representative Morris Udall of Arizona told

me that the late House Speaker Sam Rayburn used to say, "There are three rules for getting reelected: one is use the frank, two is use the frank, and three is use the frank."

In fairness, things have changed a bit on the franking front since Rayburn's day. In the face of a lawsuit filed by Common Cause — which claimed the mailings were, in effect, nothing more than tax-funded campaign literature — the House adopted Udall's plan for a franking commission to scrutinize newsletters and make them a bit less brazenly political. The commission enforces regulations limiting the size of a representative's name to 1/4 inch in height (1/2 inch on the masthead) and limiting the number of photos of him or her to two per page. These were inspiring reforms, but the new, improved newsletters still bear an uncanny resemblance to campaign leaflets.

In 1979 the Senate Ethics Committee drew up an intricate set of rules intended to produce nonpolitical mailings. The rules decree that "the type in which a Senator's name appears . . . other than [on] the masthead, may not exceed 1/4 inch in height." They limit personal references ("the use of a Senator's name or the word 'Senator' in place of a Senator's name") to an average of eight per page. A page is defined as "each side of an 8 1/4 inch by 11 inch or 8 1/2 inch by 14 inch sheet of paper, irrespective of the number of folds utilized in the design of the matter mailed." Accordion-like newsletters with each fold bearing eight references to Senator X are thus strictly verboten.

There is one slight catch: the rules contain no restrictions on personal references such as "me," "myself," and "I." Personal reference pronouns once fell within the numerical limitation. But in 1981 Moynihan's staff asked the ethics panel how to count the "we" in "we New Yorkers" (a phrase the senator is fond of using). Should it or should it not count as one personal reference — or perhaps as one eighteen-millionth of a reference, given that Moynihan is but one of about eighteen million New Yorkers? After ruling that "we" must count as one, the ethics committee pondered

further and decided to lift the personal-pronoun barrier entirely. The floodgates were opened. I counted 121 personal references in a December 1986 Boschwitz newsletter; 69 in Denton's February 1986 mailing; 53 in Roth's December 1986 "Roth Report."

Senators' pictures are limited to four per newsletter ("excluding a photograph, sketch, or other illustration in the masthead"), but "such pictures . . . must relate to the content of the newsletter. . . ." Sounds fair, but how often will a photo of a senator *not* relate to the content of a mailing about that senator? A recent Boschwitz newsletter photo of the senator jogging in a charity race was in bounds because it ran beside a five-paragraph article reporting that Medicare was costly, that exercise improved health, that Boschwitz was a jogger. "It makes you feel good!" he told the voters. "Call me — we'll go jogging together in Minnesota or Washington."

Which chamber of Congress has the more odiferous newsletter record? This is a perplexing question. The Senate has voted to make more cuts than the House in the amount of mail members may send out under the franking privilege, but the House has declined to go along. The Senate makes public the amount each member spends on newsletters, but the House does not. On the other hand, the Senate, unlike the House, has no panel to clear newsletters before mailing. Moreover, it keeps secret all cases in which its members voluntarily pay restitution for "inadvertently" breaching newsletter franking rules, and there is no case on the record of a senator being disciplined for violating them. So, in the end, I guess one could say: a plague on both houses.

A small band of congressional renegades is supporting a bill proposed by Senator Pete Wilson of California that would abolish franked newsletters entirely. Incumbents being what they are, its enactment is about as likely as Woody Allen becoming pope. Common Cause reported in December 1985 that ten of the fifteen senators with the highest per capita franking expenses were seeking reelection in 1986.

Clearly, fair play and frugality are alive and well in Washington. ■



# The non-issue in Alaska

Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) has in recent months been much shrouded in controversy. Much of this controversy has centered on whether a relatively small portion of these lands—1.5 million acres along the Beaufort Sea Coastal Plain, out of a total of 19 million acres—should be opened to oil exploration.

One of the latest salvos fired by the anti-development forces came in the form of a letter to an influential newspaper by a spokesman for an environmental group. The letter makes a couple of statements worthy of examination.

First, the writer states that there is "only a 19 percent chance of finding any oil at all in the Arctic refuge." But even at those odds—and taking risks is what the oil business is all about—the coastal plain represents the best hope for a major on-shore oil strike in the United States. In fact, within the context of risks the oil industry usually faces in wildcat areas, those odds are actually rather attractive. The coastal plain site is less than 100 miles from the Prudhoe Bay field. If oil is found in the plain, according to Interior Department data, it could represent between 600 million and 9.2 billion barrels. The point is, we'll never know unless we drill.

The letter also argues that if oil is discovered in the Arctic refuge, "we will not be able to extract all of that oil, given current technology." That's got to be the silliest anti-development argument ever raised; all the oil in any field is never fully recovered. Drilling would never occur anywhere if it became conditional on whether 100 percent of the oil could be produced. Moreover, the Interior Department's coastal plain estimates are for recoverable oil. And constant improvements are being made in secondary and tertiary recovery methods; fields are yielding more and more of the oil as technology advances.

Dubious quibbles aside, the basic argument for development remains cogent, simple, and pressing. Any oil found in the coastal plain, or anywhere else in the U.S., would be more than welcome. Oil imports are rising and domestic production is falling. Prudhoe Bay itself, the largest field in the U.S. at 10 billion barrels, has been producing for 10 years. It is currently producing at

a peak rate of about 1.5 million barrels a day—about a fifth of U.S. production—but will soon enter its inevitable period of decline. The real issue in Alaska is whether or not America should maximize its economic domestic oil and gas production to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil and its negative balance of payments—and do so in an environmentally acceptable manner.

What about the environment? Would it truly be despoiled, as the environmentalists state, if drilling were to take place?

A major issue environmentalists raise concerns Alaskan wildlife. Of all the animal species in the area, Secretary Hodel cited the caribou as the most likely to be affected. But Senator Frank H. Murkowski of Alaska has pointed out that the caribou herd has, in fact, quadrupled at Prudhoe Bay during the oil development years, and since construction of the Alaskan pipeline. Indeed, the caribou herd thrives in the area of the pipeline, in spite of dire warnings to the contrary.

Still, the acreage under discussion does include the calving grounds. Can the caribou adapt? Senator Murkowski has discussed the issue with a university scientist who has been working with caribou herds for many years. His conclusion, according to the Senator: If oil development were to occur near their usual calving grounds, the caribou would simply move a mile or so away.

The controversy over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge fills us with feelings of déjà vu. The same anti-development arguments were raised in the '60s and '70s, first over drilling at Prudhoe Bay, and later over the construction of the pipeline. We had hoped these questions were settled once and for all; to raise them now is really to raise non-issues.

The energy and economic future of the nation are too important to be sidetracked by non-issues. Oil exploration in Alaska should proceed because the national interest requires it. The arguments against development, when considered against the nation's needs, seem to fall under the weight of both past experience and expert scrutiny.

**Mobil**

# ON THE JOB

by BRUCE MAXWELL

## How I lost that story

Nearly a year ago I had my big chance at the Iran-contra story — and I blew it.

On October 5, 1986, a Nicaraguan soldier shot down an American cargo plane filled with arms for the contras. Wire service stories reported that a flight log found in the wreckage seemed to show that pilot Wallace Sawyer, who died in the crash, had flown more than 100 times in Central America. According to the log, Sawyer had also flown repeatedly for Southern Air, which was once owned by the CIA.

The log also revealed that for two weeks in June and July 1985, Sawyer had copiloted a plane owned by Champion Spark Plug Company, of Toledo, Ohio. Sawyer flew the plane to several military bases, including Ramstein, West Germany.

The Toledo connection naturally caught my eye. Champion officials said there was no connection between their plane and the Nicaraguan flights. The company routinely leased planes to other firms, the officials said, and a company they refused to identify had leased the plane for the two weeks in 1985.

Was Champion, or at least its plane, somehow involved in the contra supply network? It seemed farfetched, but worth some preliminary checking. I started by filing Freedom of Information Act requests with the CIA and the National Security Agency for any documents about Champion. I checked federal procurement records for connections between Champion and the government, but found only a few million dollars in contracts. I got microfiche records on Sawyer and the Champion plane from the FAA's Airman and Aircraft Registry in Oklahoma City, but, again, didn't find anything unusual.

*Bruce Maxwell is the investigative reporter at WTOL-TV in Toledo, Ohio.*

After several phone calls to the Nicaraguan embassy in Washington, I finally persuaded somebody there to have Managua send a copy of the flight log. But the copy I received didn't include the pages for the two weeks I needed, even though I had specifically requested that section.

By this time I'd invested a fair number of hours in the story and come up with nothing. It was time to decide whether to try again with the Nicaraguan embassy and keep pushing on the story, or to cut my losses and move on to other projects that looked more promising.

It really wasn't a hard choice. After all, who in his right mind would believe that an agency of the federal government would rent a corporate jet out of Toledo, Ohio, for some sort of secret overseas mission? Journalists are naturally skeptical, but it strained credulity to believe that the Champion plane was somehow tied in with the contra supply network.

I dropped the story, except for a continuing feud with the CIA over my FOIA request. The agency wanted me to agree to pay an estimated \$100 in search fees before it would process my request. In denying my request for a fee waiver, an agency official wrote: "Frankly, the story you are working on simply does not exist. Our Public Affairs Office has consistently issued strong denials to numerous media representatives of any CIA connection with the downed aircraft mentioned in your letters."

That made me mad. I wrote an angry appeal letter, pointing out that "there are innumerable occasions where statements by your press office and the truth were different." I also mentioned that the agency was standing on precarious legal ground, since its "assertion of 'editor' status in deciding my story doesn't exist is nowhere condoned in the Freedom of Information Act." Just for good mea-

sure, I concluded by noting that the National Security Agency had quickly granted my request for a fee waiver and had processed my FOIA request. What I didn't say was that the search turned up nothing. Months passed before a CIA appeals board finally granted my request for a fee waiver. After more months, the CIA said its search had turned up no documents about Champion.

By then it was midsummer, and I stole away to the woods of northern Michigan for the Fourth of July weekend. The minute I walked back into the newsroom, my news director cornered me. Had I seen the newspapers over the weekend? Well, no, there weren't a lot of newsstands on the quiet beach where I'd sprawled out. Someone had saved me a copy of the story from the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, though. The paper reported that special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh had subpoenaed Champion's flight records because of indications that the plane had been leased by people involved in selling U.S. arms to Iran and diverting profits to the contras. Champion officials speculated, but could not confirm, that the plane had been used by negotiators seeking to free thirty-nine Americans taken hostage in the 1985 hijacking of a TWA airliner in Beirut.

The fact that I'd been right about the Champion plane was small consolation for having been beaten on the story. I could take comfort from the fact that I had been forced to decide whether to pursue or to drop the story long before the Tower Commission issued its report, before Oliver North testified that CIA Director William Casey wanted to create a secret "overseas entity" for intelligence operations, and before John Poin Dexter testified that he had conducted the Iranian and Nicaraguan operations without informing the president and while misinforming the Congress.

My problem was that I had gone about collecting information by contacting the governmental agencies normally used to carry out covert operations, like the CIA and the NSA. I didn't for a moment dream that a rogue shadow government had established itself to conduct covert operations that even the president allegedly didn't know about.

Next time I'll be more cynical. ■



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## Is TV news shallow?

The Gulf war in 90 seconds.  
A murder in a nearby town gets half a minute.

The story of a fatal bus accident in Canada is bumped in favor of a lion cub's birth at the zoo.

TV news is selective. Its time is limited. And what it does best is capture moments. The elation of the elected. The downcast of the defeated. The joy on a mother's face when her child is found. The blank stare of a stoned teenager.

Stories with pictures.

Summaries of what matters most. That's TV news on a daily basis.

But sometimes stations move out of their summarizing role. WPRI-TV, Providence, R.I., and seven other Knight-Ridder television stations spent an entire month this year focusing on one topic: alcohol and drug abuse.

A tough task.

Today, seven out of 10 high school seniors drink. Almost half say they get

drunk once a week. Many started at age nine or 10. One out of four smokes pot. And crack use is spreading too fast to quantify.

How do you reach a generation of young people who have been overexposed to hard scare anti-drug campaigns?

WPRI-TV tried humor.

They turned to "Mr. Bill." The clay man of Saturday Night Live fame created by Walter Williams. Mr. Bill is famous for being the quintessential victim. In public service announcements, Mr. Bill was offered drugs and alcohol and steadfastly refused them even as he got dumped on and squashed.

Did these moments of humor work on such a deadly serious topic?

In follow-up interviews, the spots were remembered and talked about by teenagers. They broke through the clutter of messages and got their point across.

WPRI-TV also broadcast

its own musical play "None for the Road." Along with a teenage drug and alcohol test and several specials.

In Mobile, Ala., Knight-Ridder's WALA-TV, among other efforts, raised enough funds to keep the Partnership for Youth, an effective anti-drug force in the community, from closing its doors.

WTEN-TV in Albany, N.Y., got a strong response from its request to area high schools to submit their own public service announcements. The station was able to learn exactly how teens communicate with other teenagers and tailored their efforts accordingly.

Knight-Ridder stations in Tucson, Norfolk, Nashville, Oklahoma City and Flint all took on the same topic in a month-long marathon of news specials, editorials and series on the epidemic of addiction that has spread across the country.

It was anything but shallow. But then these are Knight-Ridder television stations.



## KNIGHT-RIDDER

We never underestimate the American people.

Knight-Ridder, winner of five Pulitzer Prizes in 1987, is a worldwide communications company with eight television stations, cable systems, business information services and 32 daily newspapers.

KOLD-TV, Tucson, Ariz. • KTVY, Oklahoma City, Okla. • WALA-TV, Mobile, Ala. • WJRT-TV, Flint, Mich. • WKRN-TV, Nashville, Tenn. WPRI-TV, Providence, R.I. • WTEN-TV, Albany, N.Y. • WTKR-TV, Norfolk, Va.

## Major innovations in commercial aircraft happen for three reasons: Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, and Airbus Industrie.

In one important respect, the commercial aircraft industry is like any other high-tech business: competition leads to better products.

Over the years, Boeing has certainly contributed its share of technical advances, as has McDonnell Douglas.

Both companies presented a formidable challenge to Airbus Industrie, the European consortium formed in 1970. So Airbus, a joint effort of companies in Britain, France, Germany, and Spain, set out to redesign jetliners from the ground up.

Today, Airbus Industrie leads in the use of composite materials both lighter and stronger than metal alone. For wings, Airbus Industrie introduced a new design that reduces drag. And the very concept of twin-engine, twin-aisle, wide-body aircraft was created by Airbus Industrie.

Such Airbus Industrie innovations as wing tip fences and efficient fuel management/center-of-gravity control, previously shrugged off by our competition, are beginning to appear in their aircraft.

Airbus Industrie has also pioneered major advances in aircraft safety, like electronic "fly through computer" controls to help pilots respond faster, the world's first automatic windshear protection system (now standard on all Airbus Industrie planes), and digital automatic flight systems.

In short, rather than being derived from the aircraft of the 1960's, Airbus Industrie jetliners are designed to carry you into the 1990's and beyond. And by "pushing the envelope" of aircraft engineering, Airbus Industrie gives aircraft manufacturers an incentive to build better planes.

 **AIRBUS INDUSTRIE**



# COMMENT

## Some like it hot

The events of this year have institutionalized the firestorm method of eliminating presidential candidates. In eras past a firestorm was hard to start and did not always destroy the target. Richard Nixon, for example, perhaps made of damper material than most politicians, survived a crisis over a secret fund, when he was running for vice-president in 1952. But the fires of 1987 quickly consumed two Democratic candidates — Gary Hart and Joseph Biden; left a third, Michael Dukakis, trying to beat out the flames; and even tossed a spark in the direction of a fourth, Albert Gore, who had committed the singularly deadly sin of exaggerating his record as a newspaper reporter. In the Republican camp, evangelist Pat Robertson was singed by the revelation that his first child had been conceived out of wedlock.

Clearly, there are things the voters ought to know about a candidate, such as the fact that he has fantasized his achievements as an officeholder (see "Candidate Reagan and 'The Suckered Generation,'" page 33) or falsified his college record and on occasion appropriated, almost word for word, the autobiographical reflections of a British politician. But this does not justify the use by the press of techniques that seemed to make Biden's transgressions as egregious as the sale of arms to Iran.

One technique used to torch candidates is to present the revelation as an investigative coup, even when, as it turned out in the case of *The New York Times's* Biden plagiarism scoop, the raw material is a handout from a rival candidate's camp. Another is to fan the flames by offering in the same story both the revelation and the appraisal of the havoc it is supposedly causing even before prospective voters have had time to absorb the essence of the news itself. (This practice was especially evident in *The Boston Globe*.) Finally, the fire can be kept going by stoking it with the opinions of a small group of political consultants and experts whose main function would seem to be to provide supportive quotations to political reporters.

Consider, for example, the case of William Schneider of the American Enterprise Institute. Identified early on as the person who had supplied Biden with the tape of the Neil Kinnock commercial that the senator aped with such disastrous results, Schneider became a widely used source, popping up as a "campaign expert" in a *Times* story on September 18, as a "political analyst" in the *Globe* three days later, as a "political scholar" in *USA Today* on September 22, and then in three places — twice as a "political analyst," once as a "political observer" — in *USA Today* on September 24. Judgments, epigrams, assessments flowed

freely from Schneider and a handful of others of his ilk.

What's wrong with this? Mainly, that political reporters and political professionals seem increasingly to have drawn themselves into a tight little mutually affirming circle, from which other sources such as officeholders and party officials are generally excluded. The resulting view of politics is a narrow one, centered on the consultants' chief interest — the value of the candidate as package.

Such controversies can be reported in other ways. *The Des Moines Register* treated the Biden affair from the outset as an attack by one campaign on another rather than as a reportorial achievement. *Time*, the first to report that Dukakis's campaign manager had been the source of the "attack video," also saw the story in a political context.

The 1988 campaign may see more firestorms. If so, presumably the most that can be asked of political reporters is that they combine their eagerness to uncover all information bearing on a candidate's fitness with a willingness to talk to a greater range of sources, including perhaps even a voter or two. They might find that many voters are coming to resent the role the news media are playing in narrowing the choice of candidates. As one Iowan was quoted as saying in a recent *Times* article, "It seems like they're telling us who can run and who can't run."

## Darts and laurels

**Laurel:** to *Money* magazine and staff writer Suzanne Seixas, for a "One Couple's Finances" column (July) that humanely explored the dollars-and-sense devastation wreaked by AIDS on a homosexual flight attendant and his disease-stricken lover. Unfortunately, *Money's* quiet investment in social consciousness produced an unforeseen return: 103 cancelled subscriptions from offended readers like the California doctor who irately asked, "Must the media sanction — no, in effect promote — this [homosexual] way of life under the guise of better money management?" For a striking contrast in social maturity in the financial media field, see the July 6 *Barron's*, in which investment adviser Steven F. Schwartz delivered a gratuitous send-up of Wall Street "fats" (female arbitrageurs, traders, and short-sellers) that was sexist, strident, and unfunny to boot.

**Dart:** to the Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, *Citizens' Voice* and Carl Romanelli, the paper's night city editor, who daylights as the head of a public relations firm. Among Carl



Romanelli and Associates' more recent billings (as revealed by the Wilkes-Barre *Times Leader*, archival of the *Voice*): some \$2,500 to political candidates for work on their spring primary campaigns.

**Dart:** to *Condé Nast's Traveler*, for an editorial policy gone slightly astray. Mapping out the territory in the first (September) issue, editor-in-chief Harold Evans explained to readers that "Travel is a marketplace with a million hawkers. It's bewildering enough to choose among the honest vendors; and there are touts at every corner. . . . Condé Nast's Traveler is different. . . . We have no hidden . . . no higher obligation than the one to you: to provide truth in travel." Elsewhere in the issue, however, in a department headed Word of Mouth, *Traveler* was touting "a smart idea" called Off the Beaten Path: "OBP is the name of Pam and Bill Bryan's Montana-based business. The Bryans design custom trips in the northern Rockies; they will provide you with a day-by-day itinerary, reservations, guides, maps, menus, a reading list, and anything else you might want. They have a strong commitment to preserving the environment. . . . Write to Off the Beaten Path. . . ." One thing the item neglected to provide was a guide to the masthead, where Pamela R. and William L. Bryan, Jr., are listed as regional correspondents for the magazine.

**Dart:** to *USA Today* and its Vermont distributor, *The Burlington Free Press*, both owned by Gannett, for a bicentennial tribute to the time-honored corporate values of self-promotion and greed. As part of a busy slate of events jointly celebrating the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution and statehood for Vermont, the state's bicentennial commission approved a plan put forth by *USA Today* that promised to put into the hands of Vermont's public school children copies of a document called "USA Freedom," described as a colorful tabloid filled with historical articles by numerous notables that would be untainted by advertising or any commercialism whatsoever. (The \$60,000 cost of the copies, distributed free by the National Guard, was funded partly by the commission, partly by local businesses, and mostly by, as the *USA Today* representative put it, a "totally altruistic" Gannett.) What the kids actually got, however, was something else: copies of *USA Today* (some of them two days old), wrapped around such various inserts as an 8½-by-11-inch photocopy of the Constitution (too reduced to read), *USA Today* subscription blanks, and — in a small percentage of cases — the "Freedom" tabloid. (In the uproar that ensued, the *Free Press* carried an apology from its publisher and a promise to make good on the original plan — without, presumably, further involvement of the National Guard, for whose delivery services the governor was reportedly considering billing Gannett.)

**Dart:** to the Union City, New Jersey, *Dispatch*, for lacking the courage of its convictions. On May 1, the paper carried a strong editorial urging state lawmakers to meet their "moral obligation" to low- and middle-income tenants by adopting legislation designed to limit condominium conversions; the failure to pass such legislation, the *Dispatch* observed, "can be fairly viewed as the granting of a license

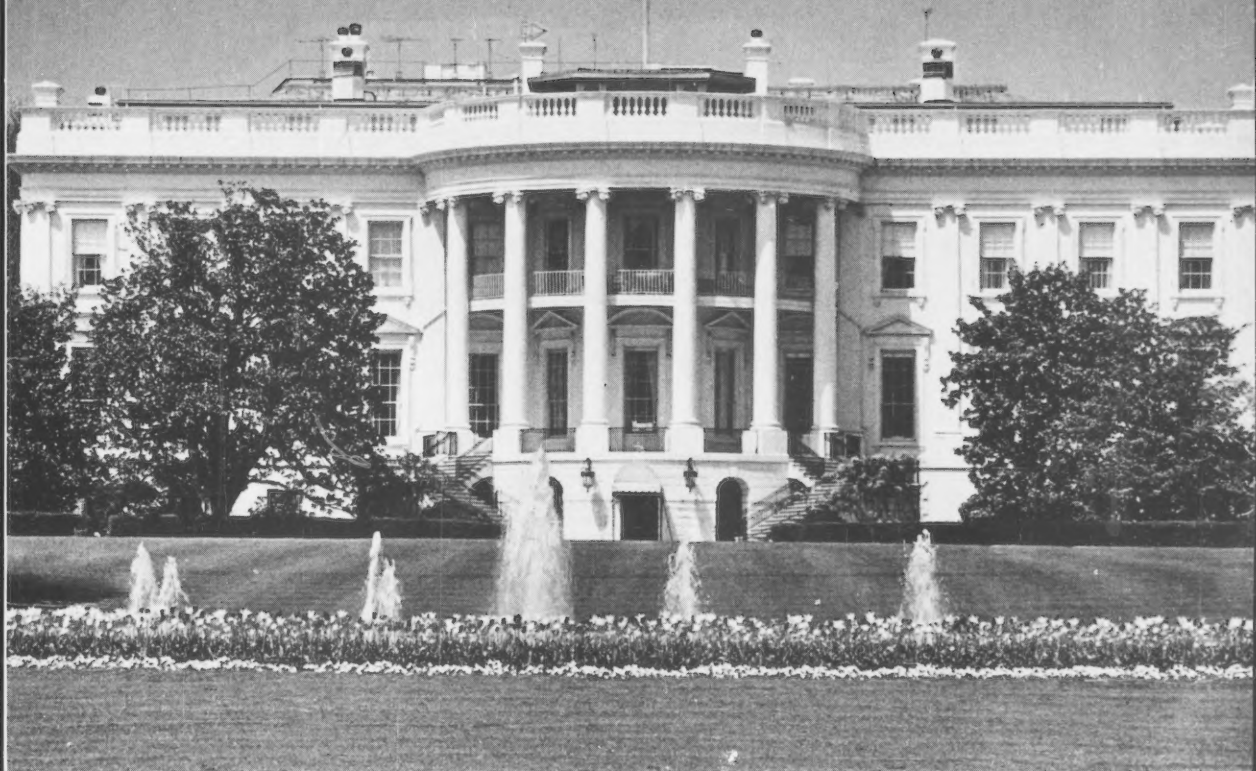
for unprincipled landlords to exploit the housing shortage — and their tenants." But over the next nine days the *Dispatch* apparently underwent a conversion of its own: "The proposed state law," the paper concluded in an editorial published on May 9, "will serve in the immediate interests of tenants but, we fear, in the long run it will lead to problems. . . . Our suggestion is that the governor, rather than signing this legislation, develop a program of his own that balances the interest and welfare of all state residents." A possible clue to the paper's change of heart: a May 7 story on the *Dispatch's* front page, in which it was reported that, in an unprecedented protest, nine local real estate brokers had called the paper to cancel ads.

**Laurel:** to *The Charleston Gazette* and investigative reporter Paul Nyden, for documenting the wide discrepancy between the skyrocketing malpractice premiums charged to doctors by insurers and the low malpractice settlements that are actually made. Based on the 417 reports of malpractice settlements filed in West Virginia (as required by law) since 1983 — reports obtained only after a two-and-a-half-year legal battle between the state Board of Medicine and the *Gazette* — Nyden's series revealed, among other things, that nearly two-thirds of all cases were settled for less than \$20,000; that in 1986, one prominent company had paid out less than \$4 million in settlements, as opposed to its projected losses for the same period of more than \$100 million, on which a hefty rate hike had been based; and that the medical board has never issued a disciplinary order to a doctor based on the (sometimes blood-chilling) information contained in the malpractice reports. Accompanying the series was a handy sidebar listing the name and location of each doctor, and the number and amount of the settlements in which he or she was involved.

**Dart:** to the Midland, Michigan, *Daily News*. When a local energy company in the job-depressed area took steps to gain approval of a plan that would create an industrial development district — and, not incidentally, a tax abatement for the company — the paper came down hard. "As a matter of record, the *Daily News* does not think tax abatements are a good idea," the paper editorialized on August 27. "We continue to believe," it reiterated the following day, "that tax abatements have outlived their usefulness." Neither piece mentioned the fact that the paper is itself the beneficiary of a presumably useful, twelve-year, 50 percent tax abatement granted in 1984 in connection with the rehabilitation of its printing plant, which, the paper had argued, would allow it to retain seven jobs and create eleven new ones.

**Dart:** to the Cherry Hill, New Jersey, *Courier-Post* for (in Shakespeare's apt phrase) "chronicling small beer" and splashing some forty-eight column-inches, including an 8-by-4-inch photo, on a "profile" of Spuds, a dog who appears in television commercials for Anheuser-Busch. Based on an interview with the company's public relations spokesman playing the role of Spuds, the weightless feature managed to mention the "Bud Light" brand no fewer than eight times. ■

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Reagan and reality: Part I

# Candidate Reagan and 'the sucker generation'

by JAMES DAVID BARBER

However one rates recent presidents, there is no denying this fact: president after president has been picked for virtues he turned out not to have.

In 1964, we elected "Peaceable Lyndon" Johnson, who consistently presented himself as determined to stop the war in Vietnam, constantly contrasting himself to that "war-monger" Barry Goldwater. Johnson went on to turn a skirmish into mass slaughter.

In 1968, Richard Nixon advertised himself as a calmer of crises, an open and delegating executive devoted to rational, empathetic politics which would "bring us together." Instead, his behavior in office spurred political chaos, a White House conspiracy to cut past the Constitution, and the first sure-to-succeed effort to impeach a president in history.

In 1976, an important dimension of Jimmy Carter's image, in addition to his morality, was his competence; he seemed a political engineer, a systematic operator. From the start, the Carter White House was a font of fumbling, especially with Congress, paving the way for the Reagan replacement.

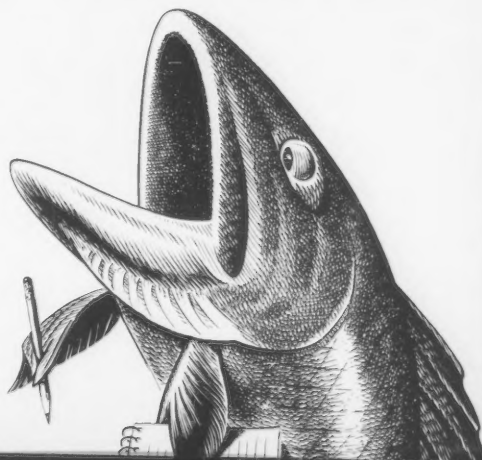
By 1980, one might have thought the shocks of disillusionment would surely have turned observing skeptics away from campaign images to the records of the candidates — from the hopes to the facts. Ronald Reagan fit the national mood nearly perfectly. He projected precisely the confidence and warmth that an electorate battered by political anxiety needed. He also reassuringly projected realism. Like Jack Kennedy in 1960, Reagan rattled off statistics. He recounted illustrative historical incidents. He set forth specifics of his record as governor of California.

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The Reagan presidency has confirmed him as a most happy fellow. But Reagan the realist has proved a myth. From supply-side to Bitburg, from Star Wars to Grenada, from Reykjavik and Qaddafi "disinformation" down to the revelations of Iranscam, Ronald Reagan has emerged as a president whose indifference to factuality is matched only by his devotion to theatricality. Far from trivial, Reagan's factual misstatements are right in the middle of the big life-and-death crises of this age, such as nuclear proliferation, military strategy, arms control, human rights, international trade, third world debt, domestic economics, welfare policy, public education, and the preservation of the environment. His errors have not been one-time slips of the tongue or "gaffes" but repeatedly reiterated false assertions which he continues to make after their falsity has been revealed. He gets his evidence from old movies. He has no interest in the awkward actualities of history or the complex realities of the present. He misrepresents his own life history to fit the "values" he advocates. To ask, regarding the Iran-contra scandal, what he knew and when he knew it is to suppose that knowledge is a meaningful Reagan concept.

That the United States, its position in world politics rap-





idly deteriorating, should have elected a president of this ilk is not only a political offense but also a journalistic mystery. For long in advance of the election of 1980 these Reagan qualities were known. (Indeed, an awareness of the man's literally fantastic character formed the basis for early Democratic misjudgments: that it would be impossible for

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**“The implication was that  
the campaign tests  
presidential qualities —  
which, of course, it does not”**

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Reagan to get nominated, and that, if by some fluke he did, it would be easy to defeat him.)

No one was in a position to bring the truth about Reagan across to the public except journalists. Charges by Reagan's political competitors — such as George Bush's claim, in the March 7, 1980, *Washington Post*, that Reagan “has no real understanding of the dangers we face in the decade of the eighties” — could not be tested by voters unless the media supplied the information needed. But a flood of information alone is little help; the reader needs to know which facts are significant. Now that party leaders and other trusted national sages have disappeared, the public has to get that guidance from columnists and editorialists. If in 1980 the voters were to be warned of Reagan's tragic flaws, they would of necessity have had to turn past the long “Campaign 80” features and the pre-season candidate “profiles” to the inside pages where the familiar and profoundly attentive editorial writers and columnists would help them straighten out their thinking. And the time to get that guidance was not back in the preceding year, when few readers could summon up the necessary attention, or in the summer of 1980 after Reagan had already won the delegates necessary to nominate him, but during the primary-season decision time — roughly January to June.

Reviewing the editorials and columns for this period in two leading newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the first thing one notices is that, on the few occasions when comments did focus on the candidates' qualifications, by far the most common reference was to the candidates' campaign performance rather than their records. The clear implication to curious voters was that the campaign tests presidential qualities — which, of course, it does not. These days a presidential campaign tests the candidate's capacity to endure the physical stress of extended travel, to deliver the same speech over and over again, to beg money from rich donors, to spin out television commercials, to announce detailed plans for government action in an unknown, yet-to-come political context, to impress crowds of recruited teenagers, and, what is perhaps most important, to puff up one's pictorial image for television news. What is tested, then, is not the candidate's actual lifetime per-

formance — the factual historical record — held up against the requirements of the presidential job, but rather his capacity to prance along the campaign trail, pretending, with the help of highly paid media coaches, to be what he is not. The campaign is a basket-shooting contest to pick the best poker player. As Joseph Kraft put it in a March 23 *Washington Post* column: “The personal qualities so critical to winning and losing nominations bear little relation to government.”

A few editorials in *The New York Times* did take note of Reagan's “vague simplicities” (June 8), his taste for “political pabulum,” and “much simplistic nonsense” (March 23). Anthony Lewis perceived Reagan's “emptiness of mind” (*Times*, March 20) and Ellen Goodman saw him as a potential world leader “unencumbered by knowledge” (*Post*, March 25). James Reston, probably the most consistent critic of Reagan's presidential character, noted that the candidate “has a backside foremost way of saying things first and thinking about them later” (*Times*, April 16), that he “handles his formal speeches well until he's questioned about the facts” (April 11), and that “he keeps talking nonsense about foreign policy” (May 11).

But these quotations, plucked from the sprawl of spring commentary, give the false impression of sharp focus on Reagan's casual attitude toward reality. In fact, week after week went by with only a few scattered references to the topic.

An evident reason for the press's generally benign neglect of Reagan's presidential inadequacy was that few journalists believed Reagan's candidacy could possibly succeed. As late as March 5, 1980, Meg Greenfield noted in *The Washington Post* that “most of the journalists I know and much of the Eastern world I live in find Reagan's candidacy preposterous.” Later that month, Anthony Lewis wrote that, to liberals, “Reagan has seemed too far-out a figure to take seriously.” Why delve into the qualifications of a candidate sure to lose, if not his party's nomination, then, at least, the election?



anxieties were allayed by confidence that the campaign itself would test his competence. On April 9, David Broder surmised that “Reagan has not yet crossed the ‘credibility barrier’ that stands in the way of any challenger's access to the presidency. It is the test of plausibility that makes people feel comfortable with the phrase ‘President Reagan.’” Judging from the Kennedy and Carter cases, Broder thought that “Reagan will probably not be able to clear that hurdle until the American electorate sees how he handles the choice of a running mate, the conduct of his party convention and, most important, the television debates with the incumbent in the general election.” In the months to come, the media would approach Reagan with increasingly “skeptical scrutiny.” James Reston's hopeful perception was that Reagan's “re-



cent blunders on simple facts, and his tendency to do his research after he speaks rather than before are becoming a major issue in this campaign" (April 13).

By focusing on the campaign — that temporary, amorphous, shifting, artificial clutch of events — commentators unplugged the essential predictions about Reagan from the requirements of the presidency on the one hand and from Reagan's record on the other. Thus the way was opened for just about any storable proposition concerning how a President Reagan would behave. Joseph Kraft wrote in February that "in forging to the fore . . . Reagan proved once again that he is ill-equipped to deal with the nation's most pressing business." But there was no clear way to challenge such wildly wrong predictions as that of Reagan adviser Richard

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## ● Obsession with the immediacy of the campaign meant that Reagan could pretend to have been what he never was ●

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J. Whalen: "Reagan possesses those qualities essential to political success and effective leadership: inbred caution, an instinctive sense of priorities, a practical flexibility, a willingness to compromise on less important matters, an aversion to needless risk-taking, and, above all, a crisp, calculating intelligence that seldom strays for long from the issue at hand" (*Post*, March 23). Nor could the candidate's own predictions be challenged empirically, as when Reagan claimed that "We're going to be so respected that never again will a dictator dare invade an American embassy and hold our people as hostages" (Anthony Lewis, March 20). Or when he said, "If there's one statement I'd like you to remember, it's this. . . . In my administration there will be no more betrayal of friends and allies by the United States" (William Safire, *Times*, March 24).

What was missing was testing such prophecies against the Reagan record. "I've been running on my record," Reagan said. But the obsession of journalism with the immediacy of the campaign meant that he could pretend to have done what he did not do and to have been what he never was.

He was helped along by such "experts" as the one who started his list of Reagan executive talents with: "First of all, he's got an excellent memory" (Ralph Goldman, *U.S. News & World Report*, July 21).

A better help to Reagan were columnists who simply took his word for the facts, as when Tom Wicker made passing reference to Reagan's claim that "when he was governor of California, unpaid volunteers put in 117 days each, coming up with 1,800 recommendations for reform, of which 1,600 were implemented" (*Times*, May 25). Reagan had not only served two terms as governor in the limelight but, as Broder had noted in February, he had been running for

president for twelve years. In a long profile published in the April 26 *Washington Post*, Lou Cannon wrote of Reagan's governorship that "overall the real picture is substantially different than the one Reagan paints for his audiences," while Robert Lindsey, in a June 29 article in *The New York Times Magazine*, quoted Reagan's main Democratic ally, Bob Moretti, as observing that "the way he acted as governor didn't resemble his rhetoric."

Yet, surprisingly, his official record did not catch the sharp attention of columnists and editorialists as he approached the nomination that would win him the presidency. A few intelligent corrections were there; Ellen Goodman's March 25 review of Reagan's record on issues of women's rights demonstrated that he was not a rigid ideologue. But only in a March 23 *New York Times* op-ed piece by Michael Calabrese does one find Reagan statements systematically assessed against the Reagan record. As Calabrese put it, "That he can now claim he accomplished his conservative goals or promises, and actually campaign on his record without serious rebuttal from the news media, is a credit to his McLuhanesque mastery of media management." Calabrese proceeds to refute with clear facts Reagan's description of his gubernatorial record on welfare reform, abortion, taxes, and the Equal Rights Amendment, drawing on precise, recorded information presented by six leading Republican legislators who had supported Reagan in his California campaigns. That fall Calabrese provided additional details in *Selecting a President: A Citizen Guide to the 1980 Election*.

Reagan himself attached the highest saliency to his performance on welfare reform. Asked in a *Washington Post* interview (April 4), "What are you proudest of in your public career?" Reagan answered, "I think the single, probably biggest achievement was the reform of welfare [in California], which turned out to be the most comprehensive and successful reform of welfare that's ever been attempted in this country."



Reagan boasted that his welfare reform cut 364,630 recipients from the welfare rolls. Calabrese demonstrated that this was simply not so. He quoted the Republican legislators as stating: "The total number of recipients on welfare in California nearly doubled during the Reagan years, while the state's population growth rate decreased from three percent to one percent per year." Reagan claimed that his reforms saved "almost \$2 billion" for taxpayers. In fact, Calabrese pointed out, welfare costs tripled under his regime. Reagan claimed that his reforms increased aid to the "truly needy" by 43 percent. In fact, Calabrese wrote, the Reagan administration had fought a hard, bitter battle for four years in the California courts against implementing the federal law requiring the cost-of-living increases in welfare payments and had made the in-

crease only when the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare threatened to cut California's federal funding by \$700 million if it did not. Reagan claimed that "the various work incentive programs put more than 76,000 welfare recipients to work in fiscal 1973-74, including 47,000 through CWEP [the Community Work Experience Program]." In fact, Calabrese reported, still quoting the six California legislators, CWEP put only 4,760 recipients to work, and the 76,000 Reagan had referred to were simply the total number of welfare recipients who found work as the economy improved.

In other words, Candidate Reagan lied repeatedly about what he claimed to be his greatest achievement as governor. He lied about his lesser achievements as well. He claimed to have cut taxes and government spending, for example, when, as Calabrese pointed out, he put through the largest tax increase in California history and oversaw the highest growth rate in government spending.

Former Republican state senate leader William Bagley, who had been a close working ally of the Reagan administration in Sacramento, was on the mark when he said that Reagan's account of his record was an "absolute, total misrepresentation of the facts." His false claims were not trivial or irrelevant but rather the foundations of his justification for presenting himself as a candidate for president. And his subsequent performance in the office of president has shown the significance of Reagan's tendency to reject the facts.

When it was discovered that Reagan was purveying misinformation about the highlights of his record, the commentators should have banged the gong and flashed the lights, calling for strong and steady focus on Reagan's indifference to reality as a quality dangerous to the presidency. Such an alarm could have triggered a hard look at his biography as a whole, in which fantasy ruled his mind at least from the time of his first main job — dreaming up the details of ball games on the radio.

Clashes between record and rhetoric are not to be taken only as moral defects but as clues to baseline presidential qualities. The reduction of politics to morals will be a special temptation in 1988, as we head into a reprise of 1964 and 1976 when questions of conscience overpowered pragmatism. Reagan's misrepresentations in 1980 can be judged by St. Peter for their sincerity, but should have been judged by the electorate as to what it would mean to put into the White House a president unplugged from the real world.

A president's worldview is crucial: How do his convictions as to how politics work, and should work, in international and domestic affairs connect with his actual decisions? And a candidate's character is the bottom line: Can we afford another power-grabber like Nixon, another affection-seeking pretender like Reagan? These questions are not simply moral, but political. Our lives are in the president's hands. We need to know in advance in which direction he is likely to throw us. And we are nearly totally dependent on the press and television to provide us with that knowledge.

Cutting through to the key qualities is not easy but there is no reason to suppose it cannot be done. It is not a matter

of psychoanalysis on the campaign trail — a nearly impossible task, given the full-time, highly paid media consultants busily spinning the candidate's image, warping attention away from set facts to manipulable impressions. As John Sears put it when he was still running the 1980 Reagan campaign, "What we're dealing with at this level is perceptions, not facts; you can change perceptions, but you can't change facts" (*Times*, January 27).

But reporters who step off the campaign bus and away from the motel television set can get at the facts — factual answers to key presidential questions, drawn from the candidate's past. The sources are there: interviews with people who have worked with him and can tell you what he did, news coverage from the years before the presidential bug bit him, even biographies and histories in which he appears. In 1980, such material did begin to appear — but mainly after Reagan was nominated and on his way to winning. Even then, such warnings were drowned in a flood of less significant information.



he 1987 Gary Hart story illustrates the problem and the possibility. Hart's sexual peccadillo in the midst of his campaign as the leading Democrat triggered reports that he had slept around before, indeed, repeatedly. Adding in the fact that he had thrown down a gauntlet to the press, daring reporters to tail him, the episode raised serious doubts about his political realism. But long before that bimbo fiasco, columnists and editorialists should have been looking into other disturbing questions about Gary Hart as president. Had he been a loner in the Senate? Was his rhetoric too intellectual and technological for the public? Had he a serious problem in working with the press? Such explorations — not lost in massive "Campaign 88" features, but highlighted on the editorial page — should long ago have led to close examination of President Hart, not Candidate Hart. In that way, political journalism could have moved beyond process to substance, beyond campaign techniques to the presidentially relevant facts of the life the candidate bears with him.

In June 1987, *The New York Times* took the lead in generating the needed information, asking thirteen active presidential candidates for a very wide range of detailed background facts. Executive editor Max Frankel explained to *The Washington Post* that "when we entrust our presidents with instantaneous powers of life and death, we think we have a duty to report on the essential character and history of every contender for the office."

That is a giant step forward, to be followed, one hopes, by concentrated highlighting of presidential qualifications.

Campaigning in 1980, Ronald Reagan gave us the advice we need as we move toward 1988: "What makes you think that whatever image is presented is the true image? Check me out. . . . Don't become the sucker generation."

Reagan and reality: Part II

# The myth of the Great Communicator

by ELLIOT KING and MICHAEL SCHUDSON

By the time Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as the fortieth president of the United States, the news media had already acknowledged his unique ability to communicate with the American people. Reporting on Reagan's first inaugural address, George Skelton of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "... this speech was most striking for its skilled, faultless delivery and straightforward message. . . . What Americans saw was a leader with exceptional skills at communicating with the public." *U.S. News & World Report* wrote, "Many already are acclaiming him as the most adept communicator in the Oval Office since Franklin Roosevelt." Within a year, Ronald Reagan was routinely described as the Great Communicator.

But while the media were trumpeting the president's phenomenal skills as a communicator, the polls were telling a very different story — namely, that Reagan was not a hit with the public; that, for the first two years of his administration, he was, in fact, one of the least popular presidents in the post-World War II period.

Can that be? According to the evidence, yes, indeed. While different polls of public views of Reagan have different virtues, the Gallup polls are worth special attention because they go back far enough so that one can compare the popularity of different presidents since Truman. The usual way to make this comparison is to look at presidential approval ratings of presidents who, like Reagan, came into office initially by election (Truman, Johnson, and Ford are thereby excluded). During the first two years of his administration — precisely the years when the legend of the Great Communicator grew — Reagan's average approval rating was significantly lower than his predecessors'. After two months in office, his rating of 60 percent compared to Carter's 75, Nixon's 65, Kennedy's 73, and Eisenhower's 67. At the end of a year, his rating of 49 percent compared to Carter's 52, Nixon's 46, Kennedy's 77, and Eisenhower's 68. At the end of two years, his 37 percent job approval rating trailed Jimmy Carter's 50, Nixon's 56, Kennedy's 70, and Eisenhower's 72.

All this has been noted before — not only poll by poll

in the newspapers, but in an article by Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers in the May 1986 *Atlantic*, and in professional publications in political science and public opinion research.

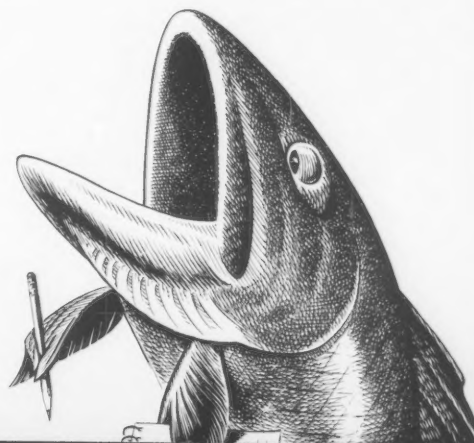
When the news media did take note of these facts, they tried to explain them away — often by saying that Reagan remained personally popular even if his policies did not enjoy wide support. This wasn't true, either, when Reagan was compared to other presidents. Gallup reported on May 20, 1982, that "contrary to a widely held belief, Reagan's personal popularity is not disproportionately greater than his predecessors'." At that time, Reagan's job approval rating was 44 percent, while public approval of his personality was 69 percent. This is a perfectly ordinary disparity. Eisenhower's personality approval was 84 percent when his job approval was 52 percent; 80 percent of the public liked Johnson personally when only 48 percent approved of his job performance. For Kennedy, comparable figures are 86 percent and 64 percent, for Nixon 78 percent and 55 percent, for Ford 69 percent and 44 percent, and for Jimmy Carter 72 percent and 48 percent.

A look at press coverage in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and three leading newspapers — *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post* — during the first two years of the Reagan administration shows that the press consistently assumed a degree of popularity that was not reflected in the polls.

On March 18, 1981, *The New York Times* ran a brief report on the Gallup poll at the bottom of page 22: "President Reagan's handling of his job after eight weeks in office

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wins less approval from the public than any newly elected president in 28 years, according to the Gallup poll." As the story went on to point out, not only were Reagan's "approval" ratings the lowest, but his "disapproval" ratings were nearly three times higher than the ratings of the other presidents.

But on the same day's op-ed page, James Reston reported that even Democratic leaders in Congress "concede that the president has public opinion on his side." Why did they concede that? What evidence supported this assumption? There seems to have been a great disjunction between what the polls said and what the polls believed.



On April 25, in *The Washington Post*, Barry Sussman's assessment of the first hundred days of the Reagan administration attributed Reagan's high job approval rating to his "magnetism," and held that "in every personal measure Reagan stands about as high as anyone who espouses such controversial programs could." It seems Reagan's personal magnetism explained just about everything whether the polls reflected that magnetism or not. To be sure, at the time Sussman wrote Reagan's popularity had just taken a sharp turn upward — his approval rating in the April Gallup poll was 67 percent — but observers now see this surge in popularity as a sympathetic rally-round-the-president response to the assassination attempt on March 30.

*Newsweek* made the same judgment May 4, but one week later reported, without any mention of the surprisingly low approval ratings for Reagan's first months in office, that Reagan's presidency was wrapped in "a blanket of personal goodwill unmatched since Dwight Eisenhower." In what may have been the low point of early coverage of Reagan's popularity, *Newsweek* held that Reagan's popularity ratings in some surveys "are the highest in polling history." That was simply false. The evidence *Newsweek* cited was a Robert Teeter poll in which 48 percent of the public held the country to be on the wrong track, compared to 82 percent in 1979. This was not a direct measure of Reagan's popularity at all.

On May 18 *Newsweek* reported that "a swell of personal sentiment and political support for Reagan in the outlands" had settled the congressional battle over the budget. *Newsweek* cited no source for its assessment of public opinion in the outlands.

By the fall of 1981, Adam Clymer of *The New York Times* was reporting in a story on a New York Times/CBS News poll that "President Reagan's once solid grip on public support appears to be loosening somewhat because of worries about the economic situation. . . ." All well and good — except for that opening phrase about Reagan's "once solid grip on public support." There is no polling evidence that Reagan ever had such a grip. All newly elected

presidents get the benefit of the doubt from citizens — but Reagan got considerably less than his predecessors.



The new year of 1982 began with a new Gallup poll about which Adam Clymer wrote on January 10, "Public approval of President Reagan has slipped below 50 percent for the first time and he now stands lower than President Carter did four years ago, according to the latest Gallup poll." This is misleading. It suggests by the use of "now" that slipping below Carter in the polls was a new development. In fact, more often than not during his first year in office Reagan trailed Carter in the Gallup polls.

On January 21, Lou Cannon of *The Washington Post* noted the president's low poll ratings but then observed that Reagan was personally more popular than his policies (failing to note, as usual, that this is typical for presidents). Two days later, Ellen Goodman wrote of Reagan's "protective coating of likability." She stressed, as if it were a peculiarity of Reagan and not a normal feature of every presidency, that "it has been as if his personal popularity had a life of its own, beyond his policies."

In a March 8 *New York Times* story, Martin Tolchin reported that eleven Republican senators running for reelection in November were seeking to distance themselves from the administration's unpopular policies "although the president remains personally popular in each of their states." How did the reporter know that the president was "personally popular" in these states? At the end of one year in office, Reagan's approval ratings in the Gallup poll lagged behind those of all of his elected predecessors.

Tolchin and other reporters did not create their assumption about Reagan's popularity out of thin air. Apparently, the senators or their staffs whom Tolchin talked to held the

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same assumption. Tip O'Neill's public complaints of Reagan's disarming popularity (May 18, 1981, *Time*, and November 8, 1981, *Washington Post*, for instance) were very likely typical. But how did O'Neill or anyone else in Congress know what the public was feeling?

A story by Hedrick Smith that ran in the *Times* the same day as the Tolchin story reported a New York Times/CBS poll indicating a sharp decline in support for Reagan among



blue-collar workers. In April 1981, 63 percent of union membership households had approved the president's handling of his job; by January, the figure was down to 43 percent. By focusing on this blue-collar decline in support, the story gave the impression, again, that Reagan was widely popular except among those most directly affected by a declining economy. The piece mentioned, but only in passing, that support for Reagan in non-union households had also declined in the same period — from 69 percent to 51 percent. Again, Reagan's general popularity seems to be simply assumed even when specific subgroups are reported to be slipping away from him.

On August 8, 1982, Richard E. Meyer of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote a page-one story headed **THIRD OF REAGAN VOTERS WOULDN'T BACK HIM AGAIN**. This was a conservatively worded headline; fewer than half (49 percent) of the voters who had voted for Reagan in 1980 asserted they would like him renominated, 35 percent wanted him dumped, and 16 percent had no opinion. Again, there was an effort to explain this decline in support for a leader who was presumed to be overwhelmingly popular, other things being equal; the decline was attributed to lack of confidence in Reagan's economic policies. And, again, this was contrasted to Reagan's great personal appeal: "Despite the President's popularity. . . ." No evidence of that popularity was offered.



o sum up: at a time when President Reagan's poll ratings were significantly lower than those of other presidents, the press reported that Reagan was unusually magnetic and popular. The media took Reagan's popularity for granted and tried to explain away low polls — Reagan was popular but the economy was on the downturn; Reagan was popular but his policies were not well liked; Reagan was popular but. . .

Since the polls provided no evidence for Reagan's popularity, how did the press arrive at its judgment? How did it happen that the press was, as Elizabeth Drew later said, cowed by Reagan's presumed popularity (as was the Congress)? A few possibilities come to mind.

Might it be that Reagan had been a communicator not so much in speaking on radio or TV to the general public but in establishing genial relations face-to-face with the Washington political and media establishment? *Newsweek* (November 17, 1980) reported that Carter and the Washington establishment hated each other; in contrast (*Newsweek*, December 1, 1980), Reagan was said to have swept the city's "glitterati" off their feet in his first post-election visit. *U.S. News* reported on March 2, 1981, that many reporters in the White House press corps liked the new president, even though they did not go along with his conservative politics. Steven Weisman's account of Reagan's first hundred days in the April 26, 1981, *New York Times Magazine* held that

official Washington had been captivated by Reagan's affability. Did Washington society — including the Congress and the media — project its personal liking of Reagan onto the American public?

Or did Reagan's electoral victory overwhelm Washington? Reagan picked up just over half the votes cast in 1980, but his margin over Carter was impressive (51 to 41), with John Anderson gathering most of the rest. Today, few observers see the election as a vote of confidence in Reagan

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## ● Did Washington society — including the media — project its own liking of Reagan onto the public? ●

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the man or his policies (nearly four out of five Reagan voters supported him because of Carter's poor performance, according to a November 17, 1980, *Newsweek* account). But the press, perhaps overawed by Reagan's electoral success or buffaloed by the Reagan administration's talk of a "mandate," began to believe that it was.

Or was Reagan just an enormously effective manager of the press and the Congress? His stunning victory in his budget battle with Congress in May 1981 may have carried its own aura with it. That victory was due in part to a Republican majority in the Senate and the Republican/conservative Democrat alignment in the House. But it also owed a lot to Reagan's ability to establish a good working relationship with Congress, and to his assiduous wining and dining of the Congress, something all the more impressive for its contrast to the Carter years. Reagan proved skillful at old fashioned "bargaining" politics with a few new-fangled micro-management twists.

Or might it be that Reagan mobilized a highly affluent and efficient right wing in American politics, one that wrote letters and sent telegrams and turned up at public meetings when legislators visited their constituents? Did the Congress mistake a committed minority's support for Reagan for general public approval — and then transmit this sense to the media?

Or was there an enormous subconscious desire in Washington for the president to succeed after a string of failed presidencies — a desire that Washington projected onto the American people? Haynes Johnson wrote in *The Washington Post* of January 24, 1982, "Americans do not want to see another failed presidency." "Everybody wants our president to be up on a pedestal a little," Lou Cannon was quoted as saying in *Time* (July 11, 1983) in a story that cited the lowest antagonism between the press and the president in twenty years.

Whatever the reasons, the buzz of Washington about the skills of the Great Communicator, powerfully amplified by the news media, helped to establish a myth as truth. ■



# With the press pool in the Persian Gulf



Aboard the *Fox*: Dennis Brack, Michael Duffy, James Dorsey, Mark Thompson, Jon Bascom, Major Barry Willey, Commander Robert Prucha

## The adventures of ten journalists — and their Pentagon handlers — who found themselves in hot waters

by MARK THOMPSON

**J**ust before 1:30 A.M. Sunday, July 19, the wheels underneath our modified Boeing 707 tucked into the fuselage with a reassuring thump. The ten reporters constituting the first Pentagon press pool to cover a real military operation had just lifted off from Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington. At the invitation of the U.S. government, we were flying to the Persian Gulf to cover the U.S. Navy's first escort of Kuwaiti oil tankers under their new Old Glories. A fully staffed kitchen aboard supplied us and our three Pentagon handlers with fresh-from-the-pan omelets, preceded by hot scented towels offered on silver trays.

*Mark Thompson, who covers defense for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, won the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for his reporting on military helicopter design problems for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.*

From the start of this pool, slated to run from July 1 to September 30, we had known there was a good chance that our group — unlike the six pools preceding us — would be dispatched to the Persian Gulf to cover real news instead of military drills. It would be the first true test of the pool concept, which had been formulated following the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada, when the barring of reporters had sparked intense anger among news organizations.

The system requires on-the-scene government review of all dispatches prior to their release, and mandates that, "if copy is not redrafted to overcome valid security objections, disputed copy will be sent" to the Pentagon for "review, resolution, and ultimate release." The Pentagon, of course, serves as sole arbiter of which objections are valid.

The Pentagon's p.r. apparatus had

met with our bureau chiefs in late June, alerting them to our inclusion in the next quarterly pool and providing reams of paper outlining the rules. Secrecy was paramount — only the bureau chief and his assigned pool members were to know of each organization's participation. Even family members were to be kept in the dark.

Another set of rules had to do with supplies. Our gear, we were told, would be limited to what we could carry. That these rules applied only to journalists — and not to our Pentagon escorts — became clear shortly after Knight-Ridder bureau chief Clark Hoyt called me at 9:15 P.M. Saturday, July 18, and told me to get out to Andrews Air Force Base by midnight. As my colleagues and I trundled in with small backpacks and tote bags, two of the three Pentagon public affairs officers arrived burdened with

huge suitcases and valet carry-ons. Other pool members included Tim Ahern, a reporter with The Associated Press; Jon Bascom, of ABC Radio News; James Dorsey, a reporter with *The Washington Times*; Michael Duffy, a *Time* magazine correspondent, and Dennis Brack, a Black Star staff photographer on assignment for *Time*; Doug Mills, a United Press International photographer; Carl Rochelle, a Cable News Network correspondent, and Ray DeFrehn and Peter Morris, the CNN crew. The all-male nature of the pool was happenstance, Defense officials insisted.

Navy Captain Steven Taylor, the Pentagon's public affairs planning director, would lead the pool, aided by Commander Robert S. Prucha, a Defense Department spokesman, and Major Barry Willey, a public affairs officer with the U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. operations in the Persian Gulf.

Once the C-135 was airborne and sleep became a pressing priority, we found another perk reserved for our Pentagon handlers: the berths. Reporters seeking slumber had to contort themselves over and under chairs to snooze.

It was 3 A.M. Monday, local time, when we landed just outside the United Arab Emirates port city of Fujairah, about fifty miles south of the Strait of Hormuz. The reason for our middle-of-the-night, out-of-the-way landing, the Pentagon officers said, was to keep a low profile. To further depress our profile, we snuck out of the plane by clambering down the crew's emergency escape ladder. We had been instructed to "keep all audio/video/photo gear stowed and covered while in transit of any foreign country on this trip," and, for that purpose, had been issued green plastic trash bags in which to stow our gear. Now, creeping off the foreign plane in the early morning hours, our unwieldy gear concealed in garbage bags, we looked like sanitation workers staging a coup.

The blast-furnace heat was incredible, even in the middle of the night. Two Toyota minibuses took us to the town's bustling and ill-lit port. A tugboat — the *Wadi Ham* — ferried us out across six miles of the choppy Gulf of Oman to the guided-missile cruiser *USS Fox*. The *Fox* would serve as home to five of the ten

reporters for the next week; the other five would soon depart for quarters on the guided-missile destroyer *USS Kidd*, the flagship for Operation Earnest Will, as the Pentagon wordsmiths had dubbed the escort mission.

We scrambled up the *Fox*'s hull on a rope-and-wood ladder and were welcomed aboard by Captain William W. Mathis. "Watch out for the heat and humidity," he advised us. His second-in-command, Lieutenant Commander Charles S. Hamilton, was more expansive. "The ship is yours!" he said.

We were then led into the wardroom for a 5 A.M. briefing by Mathis, who gave us a detailed description of our new home. A 547-foot ship weighing 7,900 tons, the *Fox* is manned by thirty-three officers and 450 enlisted men. The ship is heavily armed: standard missiles, ASROC torpedoes, 5-inch guns, Harpoon anti-ship missiles, Vulcan Phalanx anti-missile systems, Stinger missiles, and machine guns.

But what could the *Fox* do against mines? "Nothing," Mathis replied with a refreshing candor that proved to be characteristic. "All the intelligence we have says all the mines right now are at the harbor entrance going in to Kuwait" — where, he explained, the ships would be Kuwait's responsibility. He paused. "Will they go out and mine in preparation for this?" he asked, referring to Operation Earnest Will. "Jesus — I hope not."

*Fox* crew members had received a detailed memo, drawn up by Lieutenant Commander Hamilton, outlining the purpose of our stay and how we were to

be treated. "The media pool's mission is to inform the public, enhance their understanding of Middle East Force operations, and explain U.S. forces' participation in escorting U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf," Hamilton had written. We were free to enter "any space on the ship with the exception of the Missile House, Outboard [a top secret high-tech intelligence gathering system], and Radio Central," the memo added, referring to the three places where the most sensitive intelligence is collected — and where any nuclear weapons would probably be stored.

At least twice a day our Pentagon handlers would turn over copy to the ship's operations officer, who would prepare it as an "immediate military precedence message" to be transmitted to Washington, ahead of all other message traffic except operational commands. "No attempt will be made to censor the news copy," Hamilton's memo stated flatly.

Those of us based aboard the *Fox* were soon led to our sleeping quarters, while our colleagues assigned to the *Kidd* — Ahern of the AP, Mills of UPI, Rochelle and his CNN crew, and Taylor of the Pentagon — departed.

The reporters, like their hosts, spent most of their time inside the *Fox*'s air-conditioned quarters. On deck, the foul air — a thin gruel of heat, humidity, salt, desert sand, and oil industry fumes — laid a dense blanket of grime over Earnest Will.

After several hours aboard the *Fox*, Jim Dorsey of *The Washington Times* and I were sent to the ship's operations

**On the bridge:** Captain Mathis — a generally candid source — takes a question from the author after the escort mission begins.



G. L. Prier/U.S. Navy



**Photo opportunity:** A new flag flies from the stern of the reregistered *Gas Prince*.

office. Typewriters had been reserved for our use. We managed to scrounge up an aging Zenith personal computer that we could use in the ship's career counselor's office.

We produced hard copy, which was dutifully handed in to one or another of the Pentagon men — Prucha or Willey — for review and to the *Fox* commanders, after which it was taken to the radio room for transmission to Washington via satellite. Because each story we wrote was classified, it had to be encoded before it could be sent — a laborious task that took a radioman about three hours to do. Only on the last day of our assignment were we told that by handing in the computer's floppy disk, instead of printed copy, we could eliminate the encoding delay.

Ahern of the AP had no such problems aboard the *Kidd*, whose captain, Daniel J. Murphy, Jr., had served as a top aide to the media-savvy John F. Lehman, Jr., for a couple of years during Lehman's tenure as Navy secretary. Ahern's copy, thanks to the new Wang computer placed at his disposal, was automatically encoded from the start.

Our stories were classified "secret/specat," a special category of classification a notch higher than secret. The classification seemed strange, because the Pentagon had ordered that the pool be denied access to all classified mate-

rials, either written or oral. Moreover, once our stories were classified, we forfeited any control of them, because only the government can declassify.

Monday night, at the end of our first day aboard, Captain Mathis invited the five *Fox*-based reporters to his stateroom for an on-the-record briefing. Maps were tacked to the walls; Mathis seemed to enjoy fielding our queries. "The green," he said, pointing to a large technicolor chart as we feverishly scribbled notes, "indicates the track we're going to be taking with the vessels. The yellow outlines the current patrol areas that are delineated by the Middle East Force. And the red arcs indicate [Iran's] Silk-worm [missile] sites."

Mathis acknowledged that the captains of the two oil tankers, who had met with the Navy captains earlier in the day, had expressed concern over the possibility of mines. "We assured them that we will get them there safely — and I have no doubt that we will," he said. Mathis acknowledged, however, that a crafty enemy might plant mines south of the deep-water channel to Kuwait, where a dozen had been found recently.

The captain told us that the trip's first newsworthy event would occur Tuesday morning, when we would be taken over to the nearby *Gas Prince* to witness the physical act of replacing the Kuwaiti flag with the Stars and Stripes. "I'll give my boat officer orders to do what you guys want to do as far as position," he said.

Exhausted — most of us hadn't slept for more than thirty hours — we tumbled into our sacks as the ship's chaplain thanked God for our presence during the evening prayer broadcast over the *Fox*'s public address system. "We pray that our work here shall be well-documented by their work," he said.

**T**uesday morning's reflagging was the world's most exclusive photo opportunity, and the Navy knew it. The five *Fox*-based reporters were sent into the rough Gulf of Oman in a thirty-foot launch. As we approached, we could see the Kuwaiti flag fluttering above the *Gas Prince*'s freshly painted stern.

Photographer Dennis Brack wanted the *Fox* as a dramatic backdrop for his picture for *Time*. However, by the time the U.S. flag was raised — the raising

was delayed for twelve minutes pending the arrival of a Navy video crew, which recorded the event from a Navy chopper — the *Fox* had drifted out of Brack's camera view.

Sprawling over the bow of the launch, Brack asked the ensign piloting the boat to get the *Fox* back into the picture. The junior officer quickly relayed the message to the *Fox*'s bridge over his walkie-talkie. The ship turned on a dime to offer the dramatic backdrop the photographer wanted. But Brack was upset: the *Fox* was sailing in the wrong direction, he said, heading toward the *Gas Prince* instead of coming out from behind its stern.

Brack pleaded for the *Fox* to turn again and come about with its bow headed the other way. "Tell him it will be the best turn he's ever made," the photographer ordered the ensign, who dutifully relayed the information to his bridge.

Moments later, the ensign, getting into the image business, asked his bridge to relay an urgent message to the tanker: "See if you can get them to unfurl the flag" — which, he pointed out, had wrapped itself around the pole.

Finally, with the flag flying freely, the *Fox* made a hard turn, and the picture was snapped.

But the thirty minutes spent getting the shot had taken its toll among those on the small boat. Ten-foot swells, 110 degree temperature, 90 percent humidity, and noxious diesel fumes forced one of the reporters to lean over the side and surrender his breakfast to the gulf several times. It was Duffy of *Time* magazine, proving that there is a God.

Later in the day, the *Fox*-based reporters repaired to the *Kidd* for a briefing on Earnest Will from Captain David P. Yonkers, who would run the entire show. Yonkers said the escort was expected to begin the next day, Wednesday, and conclude on Friday near Kuwait. Vigilance would be the byword as the convoy threaded its way through a key theater of the Iran-Iraq war.

Would an attack be likely? "If I were to focus on the area where I were to think it might happen, it would be a threat that could not be immediately identified with either of those countries — such as mines or possibly a fanatic in a suicide boat," Yonkers said. He added, reas-

suringly, "Today there are no mines anywhere along the way."

After conceding that the Navy had no "minesweeping capability directly associated with us here," Captain Yonkers was asked how the mine threat could be thwarted. "We deal with it by the look-outs on the forecandle looking ahead," he replied, "and that's about the only way under our current situation that you can cope with that possibility."

Mathis had told the Fox-based members of the pool that a U.S. carrier-based E-2C surveillance plane, rather than the planned-on AWACS, would patrol over the southern gulf because the United Arab Emirates had "backed off" from its prior pledge to permit the AWACS to fly over its territory.

We pressed Yonkers on the point, but Steve Taylor, the Pentagon's pool-meister, interjected, addressing Yonkers in pure Pentagonese, "If I could interject, and I don't mean to do too much interjection, I don't know if you're in a position to even know the proper characterization of 'backed off.'"

Yonkers took the hint. "I don't want to get into a lot of the particulars of this mission," he told us, who had been sent halfway around the globe to report on the particulars of the mission. We then asked him about the toast the Navy and tanker captains had made on Monday to the success of the first escort. "We had a beer to drink," Yonkers said tersely.

**B**ack on the Fox, Dorsey and I, working together, filed a pair of stories — one on the reflagging, another based on our sessions with Mathis and Yonkers. On the Kidd, Ahern filed a similar set, and Duffy also wrote a lengthy file.

To our surprise, we learned that, prior to transmission, our stories would be read not only by our Pentagon escorts — as had been expected — but also by the ship's top officers, who were our primary sources. The decision, in effect, to turn the senior officers into copy editors rankled the pool.

We felt strange handing over our copy to Pentagon officials for review. But we knew that the review rule had been agreed upon in advance by the news organizations we represented, that the military had legitimate concerns regarding the safety of its troops, and that our files

would not be the only information available to reporters back in Washington.

But Dorsey and I were surprised when Captain Mathis, backed by Lieutenant Commander Hamilton, insisted that he had been misquoted twice in our initial dispatch. We didn't have a tape to prove them wrong on the first quote, so it was deleted, but we did on the second, pertaining to the United Arab Emirates' initial granting and subsequent denial of overflight rights by the AWACS.

We refused to strike the second quote until late Tuesday night, when Defense Department spokesman Prucha told us that the UAE had reconsidered and would allow the overflights, rendering moot the inclusion of this detail.

In light of the detailed briefing we had received from Mathis, Prucha told us that the release of our early reports, replete with details, would probably be held up until after we had passed through the Strait of Hormuz — in short, forty-eight hours after Mathis had briefed us. If we would write dispatches *without* such details, they might not be held up, we were told.

But the pool reporters, united in their distaste for self-imposed censorship, declined to withhold details of the imminent operation. We requested that if the Pentagon objected to a sentence or two in our stories, they black them out and release the bulk of the dispatch immediately. An uncensored version, we suggested, could be released later when those details could no longer be construed as jeopardizing security.

The story-content debate was less serious on the Kidd, where Captain Yonkers protested Tim Ahern's use of the beer-drinking episode in his story. "He was sitting there with a pencil in his hand reading copy," the AP reporter told me later. "He didn't like the impression it would give in the States of Navy officers drinking beer when such a critical operation was being planned." Yonkers refused to negotiate. "He basically said [the reference to beer-drinking] wasn't going in the story," Ahern recalled, and so it was deleted over Ahern's objection.

Meanwhile, our copy was being withheld in Washington, with the exception of our spot-news pieces on the reflagging, whose release had been authorized on Tuesday morning by Defense Secretary Weinberger.



**Holding on:** *Duffy of Time, queasy from the ten-foot swells, honors the colors.*

On Wednesday, the three Navy vessels — the Fox, the Kidd, and the guided-missile frigate *USS Crommelin* — escorted the *Gas Prince* and the *Bridgeton*, a supertanker, through the Strait of Hormuz during a seven-hour voyage that began at noon. The crews and the pool reporters stood at general quarters — battle stations — for the entire time, meaning that life jackets, helmets, and gas masks became temporarily part of our wardrobe. We had free access to the bridge and to the combat information center directly behind it, where dozens of sailors monitored glowing, beeping screens and scopes that bathed the darkened room in muted blues and greens.

To aid us in our quest for quotes and sound bites, Hamilton took to bellowing "Media alert!" whenever Captain Mathis prepared to brief the ship's crew on the transit. "It's a nice, quiet transit so far," Hamilton said midway. "We want this transit to be so boring you'll have to do human-interest stories rather than Iranian-threat stories."

The quiet of our passage was in marked contrast to the fireworks sparked back home when the Pentagon finally released our four early dispatches — by now nearly forty-eight hours old. "We didn't delete anything from them or censor them in any way, but we did hold a few back until we were sure that future operations that were described in them

Captain Mark Thompson



wouldn't be compromised in some way," then-Pentagon spokesman Robert Sims said at Wednesday's Pentagon briefing. "If it's a question of adding to the risk or endangering American lives versus an hour or two of releasing a report, I'll wait an hour or two."

Two later reports from the *Fox* — including the one detailing the uneventful passage through the strait — took nearly twenty-four hours to be released. The average delay for the thirty-nine print dispatches was almost nine hours, although some dispatches were able to make it from the gulf to the Pentagon press room in an hour.

Clark Hoyt, my bureau chief, zinged a letter to Sims protesting the holdups, contending they represented "censorship by delay." Sims denied the charge: "None of them were censored or changed in any way." Veracity, not timeliness, was the pool's purpose, he argued: "The purpose of the pool is not to ensure that they report the news first, but to ensure that news representatives are with our troops on operations where there would be otherwise be no independent on-the-scene reporting."

By Thursday, with the convoy well into the gulf, the passage had become boring. Guidance transmitted to the ships from Washington suggested we concentrate on features instead of news. The *Fox* had its first mail call in two weeks as dozens of huge sacks of mail arrived, so Dorsey and I wrote a short feature detailing the morale-boosting impact on the crew. The Navy loved it. Our colleagues back

in Washington were less impressed: not a word of it ever got into print, so far as we could learn.

The monotony was broken by a Thursday morning briefing aboard the *Kidd* by Rear Admiral Harold J. Bernsen, commander of the Navy's Middle East Force, who had overall responsibility for Operation Earnest Will. Bernsen dismissed the chance of a direct Iranian strike against the convoy. "It would not be in their best interests to utilize their forces in a direct confrontation," he said, adding that, since he regarded the Iranians as, generally, an "intelligent, reasonable people," he did not expect them to "confront us directly."

Indirect threats were another story. Bernsen's final page of typewritten notes listed the outstanding threats arrayed against the convoy. The first item: "Iranian mines." Minesweeping and mine-hunting ships, aided by helicopters scanning the waters ahead of the convoy, would protect us from mines, Bernsen said.

Rough waters precluded our return to the *Fox* aboard the small boat, so Murphy generously offered the *Fox* pool rides aboard his ship's chopper. Late that night, Captain Mathis announced that we would be at battle stations starting at 4:30 the next morning as we drew within twenty miles of Iran's Farsi island, a known launching point for attacks against northern-gulf shipping.

"So far everything is very calm — very easy," Mathis said at 5 A.M. on Friday

as golden early morning sunshine poured through the bridge's large windows. "We're on our last leg here. We've got about eight more hours. Things look very good."

That optimistic assessment exploded at 6:55 A.M. as a growling rumble rolled in from the *Bridgeton*, followed by excited voices interrupting the static on the walkie-talkie system linking the supertanker to its Navy escorts. A puff of smoke could be seen rising above the huge ship.

"I've hit something and I think it's a mine!" was the initial, chilling message from the supertanker's bridge. The tedious mission had become news.

A helicopter was ordered aloft — none had been seen scouting the waters in the convoy's path before the strike — to inspect the *Bridgeton*'s hull. "No damage to your rudder or screw," the chopper crew radioed the supertanker.

After several anxious minutes, the *Bridgeton* radioed a reassuring message. "We are listing," it said. "No danger to the ship — plenty of reserve buoyancy here." There were no injuries.

Among the reporters aboard the *Fox*, some 1,200 yards ahead of the *Bridgeton*, there was a single, daunting thought: we could be smack in the middle of a mine field. A mine strike, we were told, would probably sink any of the three Navy ships.

Within minutes, the warships had fallen behind the wounded *Bridgeton*, thirty times their tonnage, content to allow the supertanker they were supposedly guarding to shield them from any additional mines. Sharpshooters were sent to the bow of each Navy ship.

While the Navy had told us for the past four days that mines were the most likely threat, its apparent obliviousness to the reality that some might have been planted in our path seemed incredible. Even more stunning, the mine strike occurred at the shallowest part of the gulf, where a supertanker would have to pass through an underwater channel less than two miles wide.

"The channel is narrow enough [so] that anyone savvy can come here and effectively moor a mine," Captain Mathis said with characteristic candor. He added that the Navy fleet was essentially defenseless against any mine not floating in plain view. "The waters are

**Censor at work:** The Pentagon's Major Willey (rear) listens as Jon Bascom of ABC files a pool radio dispatch.







**Final words:** Admiral Bernsen briefs Bascom (left), the author, and James Dorsey of *The Washington Times* before the pool leaves for Bahrain — and home.

so shallow that my sonar is very inefficient — the bottom reverberations just drown out the return echo from sonar,” he said. “We’re relying on human eyeballs and those helicopters. If this mine were just a few feet below the surface it would be very difficult to see it.”

One officer put it more succinctly. “We were minesweeping with hope,” he said bitterly.

If ever there was an opportune time for the military to impede the pool’s work, that time was now. But guidance issued in advance of the mission said that, “should hostilities occur, pool members will be allowed to observe, photograph, and report on the situation to the fullest possible extent.” While Navy officials were reluctant to answer our questions following the mine strike, by and large they did not hamper our work. Photographers were denied the opportunity to shoot the embarrassing single-file-behind-the-Bridgeton approach to Kuwait from a helicopter, but otherwise we were all granted free rein to detail the day’s events.

Shortly after the mine strike, the Pentagon ordered our dispatches whisked to Washington as soon as possible — apparently headquarters liked the idea of independent reports from the scene and didn’t want them held up while on-scene commanders put their own spin on the day’s events.

But the local leaders plainly were upset by the mine strike. Captain Mathis vanished from view and canceled a dinner date with the reporters. Even the Navy’s public affairs officers seemed suddenly sullen. On the *Fox*, we were forced to submit two dozen written ques-

tions in an attempt to flesh out our mine-strike story.

**S**aturday afternoon, as we drew close to Bahrain and prepared to leave the *Fox*, Captain Mathis acknowledged the difficulties inherent in our relationship. “We have had an interesting five days with you,” he said, as crew members loaded us up with engraved *Fox* plaques, honorary *Fox* “cruiserman” certificates, and other mementos of our visit. “I think you guys have been pretty damn honest with me, and I certainly think we’ve been open and aboveboard with you in almost every instance. There have been areas where the security restrictions have prevented us from giving you as much data as you would like, but, like all good newsmen, you kept asking for more, more, more — and we understand that.”

We left the *Fox* aboard Admiral Bernsen’s barge, gathered our colleagues from the *Kidd*, and headed for the *LaSalle*, the Navy’s flagship in the gulf, to pick up Bernsen for a final interview as we motored into Bahrain, where our plane waited. “We’re going to have to review the whole [Operation Earnest Will] program,” Bernsen said, acknowledging that anti-mine efforts would have to be stepped up. “It has to be right at the top of the list after yesterday,” he said of the mine threat, apparently forgetting that it had been at the top of the list he had given us two days earlier. “We had no indications that there were mines in that area.”

On shore, we slipped through Bahrainian customs and boarded our plane, which had been standing by in the Mid-

dle East all week. In just fifteen minutes we finished off the plane’s beer supply. “Never with thirteen people aboard have we gone through two cases so quickly,” one of the stewards said by way of apology as the four print reporters wrote up the Bernsen interview for transmission from the plane.

Among themselves, the reporters distilled the lessons of the trip. First and foremost, it had been a success inasmuch as our audiences were better served for our having been there, rather than at our Washington desks, and for having covered the escort operations, albeit under unusual conditions. We also agreed that, contrary to Pentagon wishes, future pool copy should be identified as such in order to alert readers to the fact that the copy had been approved for release by the U.S. government. And we decided that the withholding of copy should be promptly discussed by Pentagon representatives and our bureau chiefs in Washington. Any pool passages that the Pentagon deems sensitive, we agreed, should be blacked out, with the remainder of the copy released immediately. An uncensored version should follow as soon as the details no longer constitute any threat to security.

Defense Department officials are sensitive to charges of censorship, but news is a perishable commodity. Better that the story get out today — even if 15 percent of it is missing — than that the whole story be held until tomorrow.

The Pentagon’s avowed aversion to censorship sounds strange to those of us who for years have filed Freedom of Information Act requests only to have the documents arrive with certain passages blacked out, presumably because their publication would harm national security. This willingness to segregate sensitive data from the rest should be extended to future pool dispatches. The press on this trip was troubled by the Pentagon’s willingness to hold up entire files simply because they contained a couple of sensitive details.

While we debated these hefty journalistic concerns, the CNN crew dealt with a more pressing issue: toting up the 181 hours of overtime each member had logged.

At 8 A.M. Sunday the C-135 touched down at Andrews. Washington in July felt cool, for a change. ■

# The great ratings flap

Between rigged Nielsens and newfangled people meters, how can you tell who's on top?

by CHARLES FOUNTAIN

Talk to a television news director about ratings and you'll soon be awash in report-card metaphors. It's a telling parallel, for his anxiety and trepidation are much the same as that of the adolescent who holds his report card at arm's length for a moment or two, nervously offering up a hasty prayer before stealing a first look. *Oh please, God, I'll stop disobeying my parents if only you'll let me have a C in geometry.*

*Oh please, God, I'll never ask for anything again. Just let this book show us with a 12 at six o'clock.*

Ratings have been around for as long as broadcasting: NBC attempted some random phone surveys as early as 1928, and the first formal system was in place by 1930. And, from the first, ratings have been a preoccupation, even in news. Bill Leonard, a former CBS News president, recounted in his memoirs this year a conversation he had in 1946 with

*Charles Fountain teaches journalism at Northeastern University in Boston.*

WCBS radio station manager Richard Swift, after Leonard had been hosting a critically celebrated news mélange called *This is New York* for about three months.

"Your numbers don't seem to be adding up," is how Leonard remembers Swift opening the conversation.

"You mean the ratings," I said hesitantly.

"That's right."

"Ratings aren't everything," I tried.

"Name something else," said Swift."

Journalists have traditionally resisted the pressure to pay homage to these intimidating numbers conjured up through an arcane blend of science and black magic. News's function, after all, was public service, not profit. News ratings, particularly local news ratings, were thus an internecine preoccupation, the province of astigmatic numbers-crunchers; the argot of ratings was a language that few in the newsroom understood and fewer still cared about.

But while, from a reporter's perspective, news may remain a public service, increasingly its by-product is profit. Newscasts today are the most profitable programs most local stations air, and television journalists are consequently less and less able to hold themselves aloof from the numbers. Like their counterparts in entertainment, news managers are watching the numbers as never before, clamoring about their inaccuracy (except when their own station shows up in first place); reacting more quickly to the numbers with programming and personnel moves; and, in some cases, setting out to manipulate and distort those numbers. As a result, while the general public has for years known how the leading prime-time entertainment series ranked in the Nielsens, news ratings have now become headline news as the struggle for a larger audience share produces competitive stratagems worthy of a J.R. Ewing.

A well-publicized example occurred in Los Angeles last May, when KABC-TV broadcast a special series on the Nielsen families during its regular eleven o'clock newscast. The report was a close look at how the Nielsen system works — who the families are and how they are chosen, what information is compiled and how it is compiled, and how the networks and local stations use the information that Nielsen provides. It prompted immediate cries of foul from KABC's Los Angeles competition and touched off a noisy nationwide debate over journalistic ethics. At issue was the timing of the series. It ran during the heart of the May "sweeps" period, and critics charge that KABC was trying to short-circuit the ratings process by producing a series that Nielsen families — those families with diaries or meters in their homes — would quite naturally want to watch, thus artificially inflating KABC's ratings and skewing the May "book" for the entire Los Angeles market.

## Who does the rating — and how

The G.M. and the Ford of the ratings business are A.C. Nielsen and the Arbitron Ratings Company. Virtually every one of the roughly 600 television stations in the United States subscribes to one service or the other; many subscribe to both.

Both services have "sweeps periods" four times a year, in February, May, July, and November. Sample families are selected randomly from lists of telephone numbers and are sent diaries in which, for one week, family members are asked to enter every program they watch. The number of diaries distributed depends on the size of the market to be covered: in New York, Nielsen sent out 8,312 diaries last May; in Boise, Idaho, it sent out 1,073. Just under half the families who receive diaries actually fill them out.

In sixteen of the largest markets, television stations also get overnight rating figures based on reports from 300 to 500 homes in

each of those markets equipped with meters that record when the TV is turned on, and what channel it is tuned to. These markets are also subjected to diary measurement during the sweeps periods because the meters record only the number of sets in use; diaries are needed to obtain the demographic data — which members of a family are watching which programs — that advertisers covet.

In September, the march of technology brought the country a more sophisticated — and highly controversial — audience-measuring device, the people meter. Each member of a people-metered household is assigned a code number and is expected to log in and out when watching television, thereby providing TV stations and advertisers with the demographic data they can't get from old-fashioned household meters. If television watching gets any more complicated, reading may make a comeback. C.F.

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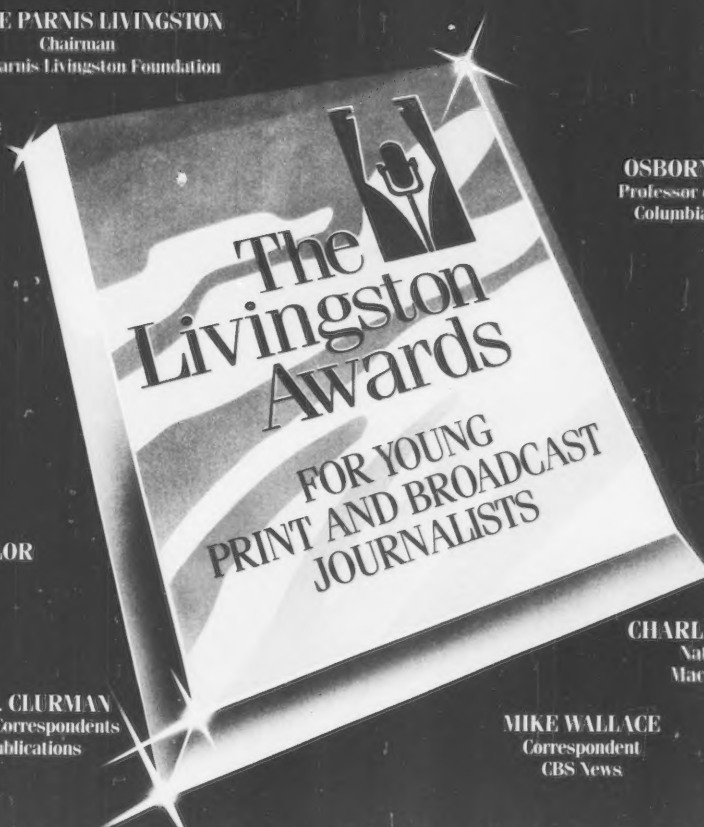
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"What [KABC] committed was, at the very least, unethical, and at the very most, fraudulent," charged KNBC news director Tom Capra.

Trying to get a leg up on the ratings is nothing new. Local television "report cards" — the ratings books — come out four times a year, and for years stations have endeavored to put forth their best efforts during these sweeps months. One news director likened the process to a full-dress inspection in the military: "You dress up and polish everything and try to put your best foot forward."

The practice is called hyping (or hyping) the ratings; and more often, instead of putting a best foot forward, what stations do during the sweeps is the journalistic equivalent of flashing a little thigh. The newscasts are loaded with

"special series," heavily advertised and promoted, aimed at maximizing audience and ratings, and sometimes pandering to the baser instincts. A perennial favorite is teen-age prostitution. Other standbys include homelessness, runaways, and the mentally ill. Most, however, move into the fringes of newsworthiness: in Los Angeles, during the May sweeps a year ago, viewers were offered series on sexual attraction ("Find out what revs up your sex drive and turns on your neighbors"); devil worshipers; female gangs; extramarital affairs; kittens; super foods that feed millions; senior citizen employment tips; senior citizens in soap operas; senior love ("Age has nothing to do with young love or young lust. Meet some seniors who know how to make a good thing

last"); back trouble; car thieves; and two different reports on summer tanning ("What's going on this summer? Not much if you like bikinis. Find out how you can get toned, tanned, and turned on this summer. Watch Cynthia Allison's sizzling report, all this week").

And how about the \$1 million in prizes that Milwaukee station WITI offered its viewers during the November 1986 ratings sweep?

Hyping the ratings has become so sophisticated that it is now broken down into subcategories. "Everybody hypes," says Pete Megroz, vice-president for television-station sales and marketing for Arbitron. "Our industry all of a sudden is concerned with the difference between normal hype and abnormal hype." *continued*

## The ombudsman who went too far

Throughout his thirteen years at KABC reporter Wayne Satz has been a high-profile crusader, breaking stories on child abuse at the McMartin Pre-school, on Los Angeles doctors issuing prescriptions for recreational drugs, and on police accountability in the shooting of civilians — a yearlong series for which he won a Peabody award in 1977.

Reporter Wayne Satz



CJR/George Rose

Satz, who is forty-two, appeared to have scored another coup last May when, in his role as KABC's ombudsman, he interviewed John Severino, the station's general manager and its point man in countering criticism of the controversial Nielsen families series. In the interview, Severino spoke with a frankness that surprised Satz, who allowed in an on-air remark, "Well, that was a moment of extreme candor," after Severino admitted that one purpose of the series had been to boost KABC's ratings by attracting the Nielsen families.

When Satz reported for work the next day to begin editing the interview for airing that night, however, he discovered that the story had been spiked. Satz did a lot of hollering and the piece aired nine days later, on June 5. It was a full and fair account of the controversy. But it was clearly embarrassing to the station and it left management — Severino and news director Terry Crofoot — seemingly uncomfortable in Satz's company. "There was a sudden inexplicable hostility from Terry Crofoot," Satz says, and on July 24 he was called into Crofoot's office.

"He seemed to be reading from a card," Satz recalls. "He told me that my researchers had been fired, my producer had been permanently reassigned, and that all my roles as investigative re-

porter, ombudsman, and media analyst were terminated."

Crofoot did not fire Satz, and the station insists he is free to come back. "Mr. Crofoot, Mr. Severino, and I have told Mr. Satz and his agent that ABC remains eager to negotiate a new contract," says Bill Waldo, the lawyer representing Capital Cities/ABC in an action Satz has brought against the station. "Mr. Satz doesn't want to work for ABC. He doesn't even want to talk about it. I see that as the problem." But Satz insists that the general-assignment position he has been offered at minimum scale (a handsome \$60,000 but "just a fraction," he points out, of what he had been making) was a pro forma gesture: "I hesitate to even call it an offer."

Satz says apologies will not make things right, either. "You have special needs if you're going to step on people's toes for a living," he explains. "You must have moral support, legal support, and the good-faith belief that you have the backing of management. I've irretrievably lost confidence that I would have that backing."

Satz has filed a \$5 million wrongful-termination suit against KABC. It would seem that in both Los Angeles and Minneapolis the unexpected but resounding winners in last May's sweeps were the lawyers. *C.F.*



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In other words, a series on summer tanning, while it may send Edward R. Murrow into a sepulchral spin, is okay — normal hype. Its purpose is to entice as many viewers as possible. But KABC's series on the Nielsen families — despite carrying news value far in excess of anything on summer tanning — was cheating. "What KABC was trying to do was to influence the sample," says Megroz, "not influence the general population."

The ploy worked — at least at first. The Nielsen families watched. And since, in Los Angeles, one Nielsen family represents between ten and twelve thousand households, KABC was a resounding winner in the May book, with a 10.5 rating, two full points better than KNBC. In the wake of the furor over the series, however, Nielsen threw out the numbers for the eight newscasts in question, and the adjusted figures left KABC tied with KNBC.

In Minneapolis there was a different wrinkle but a similar furor. KARE, Channel 11, commissioned a research project that coincided with the May sweeps. A questionnaire was mailed to homes in the Twin Cities asking viewers to "watch Channel 11 as often as possible for the next seven days," and then to check off their reactions to the various KARE anchors and special series. KARE, traditionally a weak third in the market, saw its ratings jump dramatically, more than three points in the immediate metro area, and two points overall, propelling the station past KSTP into second place, close on the heels of WCCO, the much-honored and much-respected leader in the market.

WCCO took KARE to court, charging that the station "has gained an unlawful and unfair advantage in competing for television viewership and television advertising revenues in the local television market, and plaintiff has suffered, and will continue to suffer, resulting damage." WCCO further argued that KARE, "given their success in achieving rigged ratings . . . [is] likely to repeat [its] wrongful actions, thereby causing plaintiff irreparable harm and injury."

At issue is not only the timing of the mailing, but also its size. Atkinson Research, the company that conducted the survey, refuses to say how many ques-

tionnaires were mailed, but WCCO alleges that the mailing was in the "tens of thousands, and potentially hundreds of thousands" — out of all proportion, WCCO charges, to the number of questionnaires that KARE would have needed to secure statistically valid research data. One of the questionnaires even went to WCCO anchorman Don Shelby.

The judge in the case has enjoined the parties involved from discussing it, but plenty of angry words were uttered before he issued his order. WCCO general manager Ron Handberg, in announcing the suit, called the survey "outrageous and appalling. It's the most outlandish attempt to doctor local TV ratings I've ever seen. I do not see how the people at KARE-TV can produce something like this and still sleep at night."

**N**othing so determines the standing of a local station as its ratings. In unsuccessfully seeking an injunction that would have prohibited the Nielsen company from throwing out the ratings for the Nielsen families newscasts, KABC claimed that "it has been the traditional leader in Nielsen for TV news in Los Angeles and has spent millions of dollars promoting itself as the top station. The unlawful actions of Nielsen are threatening to rob KABC of its long-standing and hard-earned status as the 'number one news station.'"

From the help-wanted ads in *Broadcasting* magazine ("Sun Belt Number One looking for the anchor that will keep us there") to convention gossip ("They've been a strong Number Two for years, but they just hired a new female co-anchor, added an entertainment reporter, spent \$100,000 on a new set, and beefed up their advertising and on-air promotion. They're really making a big pitch for the fall book"), position in the market is as much a part of a station's identity as are its call letters.

Sometimes it seems as if nothing else matters — not the awards that may clutter the newsroom walls, not the loyalty of long-time viewers, not the praise of critics for journalistic innovation and solidity. To be proud of the product is not enough, says Jeff Rosser, news director at WNEV-TV in Boston, a station that produces a newscast that most critics agree is the journalistic equivalent of those

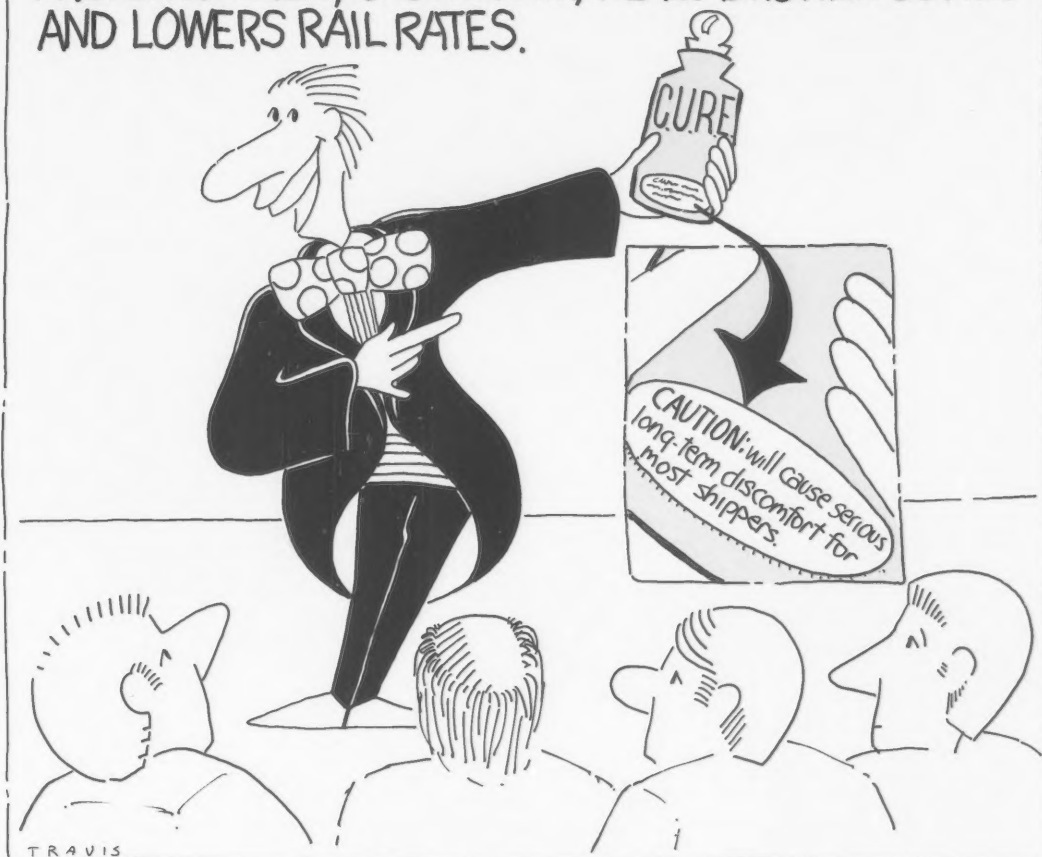
of its rivals, but a station that traditionally finishes a distant third to Boston's WBZ and WCVB. "How far do you think I'd get if I tried to convince my news staff that it's enough [just to be as good as everyone else]?" he says. "They'd look at me like, 'What planet did you just come from?' Winners want to be recognized as winners. They don't want to just go home and have their wives and kids say, 'It's okay, honey, you're a winner to us.' I want to be a winner to the world."

High ratings, of course, mean more than being recognized as a winner. In a top-ten market, a single point's difference between two stations' newscasts can mean a difference of a million dollars a year in revenues — which goes a long way toward explaining the industry's obeisance to the ratings.

It also explains the perennial concern in the business about their reliability. One problem is that different rating systems can produce different results. When household meters came into use, for example, they gave quite a different picture of viewing patterns — particularly when it came to news programs — from the picture provided by diary-keepers. "The truth is that news ratings are always lower in metered surveys than in diaries," says Pete Megroz of Arbitron. "With diaries, people often fill in what they'd like you to believe they're watching. So news does very well. Public television does very well. People would rather have you believe that they were watching the news instead of the thirty-seventh rerun of *Gomer Pyle*, but the truth is a lot of them are watching *Gomer Pyle* and the meters show it."

Moreover, it seems likely that the new people meters, as compared with diaries, will show higher numbers of younger, upscale viewers, viewers who may already have a living room cluttered with electronic gadgetry — stereos, tape decks, VCRs, computers — and will settle comfortably into the new technology. By contrast, the diary system has always been suspected of a built-in bias toward older viewers, the theory being that they may be more likely than younger people to take the trouble to fill out the *TV Guide*-like diaries. Some people in advertising and television are afraid, too, that viewers who are given people meters will tire of punching in and out

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C.U.R.E. claims it has just the remedy for those who ship by rail. What they don't tell you is that the stuff they're hawking does more harm than good.

C.U.R.E.—a curious name for an organization funded primarily by the coal and utility industries—proposes extensive new regulation of railroads through legislative “reform” of the Staggers Rail Act of 1980. That’s the same Act that rescued freight railroads from a century of over-regulation in the first place. And while C.U.R.E.’s proposals would lower rail coal rates for its principal supporters, they’d clearly leave

everyone else paying the freight—in terms of declining service; higher rates; and, ultimately, through the loss of rail service altogether.

It’s no surprise that C.U.R.E.’s pitch also ignores the fact that the majority of shippers—87 percent of those recently surveyed—feel pretty good about the effects of partial deregulation and don’t want to see the Staggers Act changed.

When you think about it, C.U.R.E.’s pitchmen have turned it all around. Reregulation isn’t the remedy; it’s the disease. In fact, not only did the Staggers Act help remove the railroad industry from the critical list, it also helped the industry become strong enough to

offer rate reductions in recent years, including two years of consecutive rate cuts for C.U.R.E.’s principal supporters.

Still, C.U.R.E. is pressing for further rate cuts and new regulations that could be the prescription for the demise of rail service in this country once and for all.

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every time they watch television, and that the ratings picture will be even more muddled than it is now.

For the time being local news programs will be rated by people meters in only one market, Denver, where Arbitron's ScanAmerica service has been in place since April. The new technology will otherwise be limited to the measurement of network audiences, for which a special national sample is used. And, for the networks, people meters will be the only game in town: on September 14, Nielsen discontinued its old system of rating network shows by household meters and diaries. (Arbitron is not a significant player in the network-rating game.)

The arrival of people meters brought welcome news to CBS. After finishing a consistent third in the network ratings all summer long, Dan Rather was back on top when the first official people-metered report came out. This did not necessarily mean, however, that viewers were suddenly liking Rather better. Throughout the summer, when the old numbers, based on household meters, were showing Rather running third, the already-in-place but not-yet-official people meters showed him first. Nobody seems to know why this was.

**T**hat audience-rating is not an exact science is hardly a revelation. In New York, Boston, Washington, and a dozen other sizable markets, the Nielsen and Arbitron numbers often disagree to the point of having different stations rank first, second, and third. Many people in television think one main difficulty is that the samples are simply too small. Nationally, only 2,000 homes speak for the more than 88 million homes with television. During a local sweeps period, one diary routinely represents more than 2,000 homes; in a metered market, a meter can represent more than 10,000 homes. Nielsen and Arbitron insist, however, that increasing the size of the sample would not significantly change the numbers. In any case, broadcasters are not eager to pay for the peace of mind that a larger sample might or might not bring; in markets the size of New York and Los Angeles, a station's outlay for ratings information already runs around \$1 million a year.

"Is [the system] one hundred percent

accurate?" says Melvin Goldberg, executive director of the Electronic Media Rating Council, a watchdog group funded by broadcasters and ratings organizations that oversees and audits the ratings process. "No, nothing is. But, as a measure, this is what you have. This is, quote, the truth."

In other words, as in a political campaign, perception is reality. Short of a television station putting employees in every home in its viewing area or installing cameras to watch the watchers, the verdicts handed down by these samples will continue to be gospel, and stations will consequently continue to seek an edge in the ratings. Policing them as they seek this edge is likely to be a growing matter of interest and debate. Nielsen's action in delisting KABC was the most dramatic ever taken by the industry. The more common "punishment" for trying to tinker with the sample is for the service to "flag" the ratings — to put a notation in the front of the book alerting advertisers to anything that might have skewed the ratings. But the numbers themselves stand, without an asterisk or any disclaimer other than the fine print at the front of the book. Imagine an umpire who catches a pitcher doctoring a ball and simply discards the ball, leaving the pitcher on the mound with his emery board and nail file.

Advertisers don't seem to care; the numbers are what count. But as the gimmicks start to run amuck and the number of flags increases, so, too, do the cries for better controls. The difficulty in setting up such controls, however, is that no one is really in charge.

"Who is supposed to deliver the sanctions?" asks Mel Goldberg of the Electronic Media Rating Council. "How do you measure the sanctions, and where is there a judge or a jury? And how do you know what is and is not bad? Remember, we're not saying this is a crime."

Goldberg's council has drawn up a set of recommended guidelines for limiting ratings distortion, and both Nielsen and Arbitron have put their clients on notice that they are likely to be quicker to pull ratings if incidents such as that at KABC recur. "It bothers me if this kind of practice is going to encourage the U.S. government to stick its nose into the ratings business," says Arbitron's Megroz. "There are a lot of broadcasters today

who say, 'We're headed towards deregulation and that's great. My God, let's not do anything that will cause the government to stick its nose back in our business.'"

Given the unlikelihood that the stations themselves will exercise restraint, a solution to the problem is probably years down the road. People meters, if they prove successful, will deliver fifty-two weeks of reports replete with demographics, and that would render the sweeps periods obsolete and eliminate the hyping — unless it was done routinely throughout the year, in which case it wouldn't be hyping but business as usual. But it will be at least two years before New York has people meters, and it will then be a long time before the system is established in other markets. Indeed, it is unlikely that it will ever be completed: Megroz believes that metering will never be economically feasible for any but the top thirty or so markets.

**S**o the sweeps will be here through our lifetime, and so, presumably, will the efforts to dress up the newscasts to accommodate them. It's a matter of competition, and the newspaper critics who decry television's practices may be forgetting their own heritage. It was not so long ago that ill-bred, ill-mannered, and ill-kempt newspapermen — reporters who would betray their mothers for a scoop and sell out their papers for a free meal — routinely engaged in behavior in pursuit of circulation that was far more egregious than the airing of a few sexy news specials.

Still, the Republic survived and nostalgia has even endowed that lusty era with a certain romance. Perhaps we are merely suffering TV's insecure and foot-loose adolescence, and a generation from now, when the industry, together with its anchors, has begun to take on a little more gray around the temples — when the number two and three stations have given up on news and the monolithic survivor dominates the market with a 55 rating and an 80 share — we'll look back on these spirited times and sigh about what fun it was every three months to be able to count on an in-depth look at the sexual mores of the runaway children of homeless members of organized crime . . . and how it affects you. All this week, at six and eleven. ■



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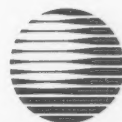
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# The anonymous-source syndrome

by DAVID JOHNSTON

A brief manual  
for reporters  
who want to kick  
a bad — and  
spreading — habit

**W**hen *The Miami Herald* assigned senior writer Martin Merzer to write a profile of Dolphins owner Joseph Robbie, the occasion being the recent opening of his \$102 million North Dade County football stadium, colleagues warned Merzer that it would be very difficult to find anyone willing to talk on the record about the dark side of this key player in the South Florida power elite. Robbie, who is seventy-one, is a complex, hard-drinking man who grew up in South Dakota wearing patched britches, and who built Joe Robbie Stadium without a penny of taxpayer money. Former employees call him "J. R.," alluding not to his initials but to a personality akin to the Machiavellian Ewing of *Dallas* fame.

But when Merzer's 206-inch profile appeared on August 2, the names of more than a dozen Robbie intimates — many of whom spoke very frankly — accompanied their quoted remarks. Merzer recalls that he had to interview more than thirty sources to find those who would go on the record about Robbie's drinking and supposed vindictiveness, as well as about his less-known generosity toward friends, family, and community.

"By not using unnamed sources, I lost a few of the richest stories that supposedly showed the darker side of Joe Robbie," Merzer says, "and I would have loved to have gotten those in. But the story would have been fatally undermined if I had used blind quotes."

Complaining about the excessive use of unnamed sources has become a cliché in American journalism. The editors of

the most respected papers have denounced it, but their front pages — and, increasingly, even their feature pages — continue to be forums for people who want to express their point of view but request anonymity. But, as Merzer's work shows, ingenuity and persistence can often get people to speak on the record. Citing one on-the-record source for an anecdote and backing it up with a specified number of unidentified sources, as Merzer did in parts of his Robbie profile, makes stories more credible.

Merzer works for a paper at which one of the key editors is a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter whose job is reportorial quality control. He is Gene Miller, *The Miami Herald's* associate editor/reporting. Anonymity, Miller believes, "is an invitation to exaggerate, embroider, embellish, slant. Or to take the cheap shot. This is true for the reporter, as well as the source. It is a bad habit and it is getting worse." He also believes that reporters "too often don't try hard enough" to persuade a source to talk for attribution. And too often, he adds, "the source reads that everyone else 'declines to be identified,' and figures, 'Hey, why not me, too?' In the end the reader is cheated."

Miller, who regularly inveighs in the *Herald* newsroom against the use of unnamed sources, acknowledges that there are times when the practice is justified, even in a feature, but he insists that readers are still entitled to as much identification as possible, as well as an explanation for the less than full attribution. He cites a feature article, written by *Herald* reporter Steve Sonsky, about

a race track bettor who would allow only his first name to be used. Sonsky explained to his readers that, when interviewed, Tony was on an "extended lunch hour," that Tony's wife didn't know about his betting, and that he had won \$252 on the first race.

What can be done to severely restrict, if not completely eliminate, anonymous sources? Merzer's old-fashioned, cast-a-wide-net approach is one way. What follows are brief accounts of other techniques that some of the nation's best reporters successfully use to avoid relying on unnamed sources — plus one suggestion for editors and a morsel for publishers and broadcasters to chew on.

**S**teve Weinberg, on leave from his post as executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., says that the single most important key to reducing the use of unnamed sources is more extensive use of documents. "I find documents in all sorts of places I might not have looked ten or fifteen years ago," says Weinberg, who is writing a book on industrialist Armand Hammer, whose fortune grew in part from his associations with a succession of Soviet leaders. "I have looked in a lot of collections of papers, something journalists don't usually do. I look in papers given to libraries. I have been to every presidential library and have found papers on Hammer in every one of them, many written by people who wouldn't talk to me. But, when I tell them what I have, they will talk to me — they want to expand on what's in the record already."

**Item: cast  
a wide net**

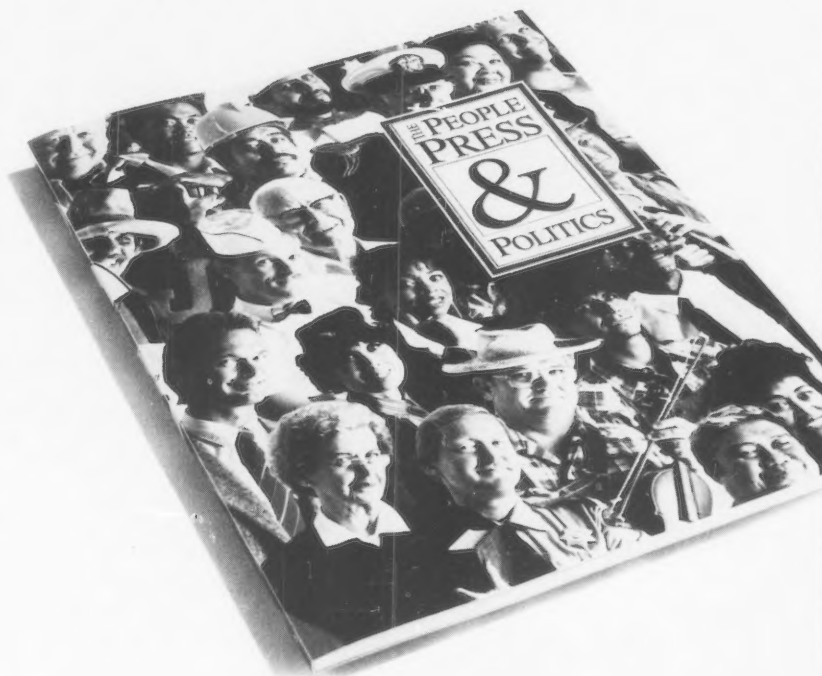


CJR/Stuart Goldenberg

David Johnston is a Los Angeles Times staff writer.

The People, the Press & Politics

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The problem with documents, of course, is that even at the best news organizations the skills needed to mine mountains of bureaucratic paperwork for nuggets of fact are likely to be in short supply. Too few reporters are able to trace real estate property-transfer records, say, or locate worker-safety records, or frame Freedom of Information Act requests so as to produce results. Such skills — which are easily taught and which all journalists should possess and be able to apply as needed — are generally expected only of investigative reporters.

Pete Carey, one of the reporters on the *San Jose Mercury News* team that won the 1986 Pulitzer for international reporting by exposing how Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his cronies bought tens of millions of dollars worth of U.S. real estate, employs an

interesting technique: he initially promises sources not to quote them by name if they ask him not to — but there's a catch. After letting his sources talk freely, he tells them that, "if they want to see something in the newspaper, they have to help me document their assertions or go on the record. Even in an off-the-record interview," Carey says, "I tell them I may want to quote them when I prepare the story and I will phone them back and tell them what I want to quote. Usually they will go on the record at that point.

"People often have scary ideas about what a reporter will quote them as saying," he adds. "But when they understand what the reporter is doing they feel more comfortable, and I feel more comfortable because I know they are less likely to back away from their comments after they see them in print."

Like Carey, William K. Marimow of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* listens to people who aren't willing to be quoted — at least not at first — and sometimes he quotes unnamed sources. But Marimow, whose dogged pursuit of misconduct by Philadelphia homicide detectives and K-9 units has won one Pulitzer prize for his paper and was instrumental in the winning of another, also uses several effective techniques to get sources on the record.

Marimow is among a growing number of reporters who wind up interviews by reading quotes back to sources. His primary motivation is to make sure that the quote is accurate and thorough and that the source will stand by it. But Marimow has a second motive: "In reading back quotes I can ascertain if the person has really answered the question or whether they tried to evade."

## AP: The price of purity

"The Associated Press and its members deplore anonymous sources," wrote Charles J. Lewis, the AP's Washington bureau chief, in a memorandum to the staff. "Surveys show that anonymity is a source of credibility problems. Readers, viewers, and listeners irately demand that we tell them where we get our information. Anonymous sources are criticized for cowardice and the news business is criticized for using them."

Lewis then restated AP policy: "We don't use anonymous sources. Reporters shouldn't file stories based on anonymous sources and editors should expunge material attributed to them." There was an exception to the ban. As Lewis put it, a three-way test had to be met. The conditions were: (1) no way can be found to attribute to a named source; (2) the information is "arguably factual, rather than an attack or a self-serving claim"; (3) the source demands that "he or she not be named."

The date of the Lewis memorandum was December 3, 1986. That was just a month after President Reagan's Iran initiative became public. Reporters like

*Jim Sibbon spent eight years as a reporter in the Washington bureau of The Associated Press. He is now a free-lance writer living in Amherst, Massachusetts.*

Bob Woodward and Walter Pincus of *The Washington Post* were already breaking into print with anonymous leaks on the Iran/contra affair. Robert Parry — then an investigative reporter for the AP but now with *Newsweek* — recalls that the memorandum "at a minimum gave people the sense that AP doesn't want that kind of reporting."

In the months following the Lewis memorandum, in order to keep up with developments, the AP incorporated into its own Iran/contra coverage excerpts from exclusive stories carried by, among other news organizations, *The New York Times*, the *New York Daily News*, NBC News, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Boston Globe*. A telephone poll of these organizations — along with a call to United Press International — showed that, while they are all concerned about the overuse of anonymous sources, none excludes them from news stories as strictly as the AP.

According to Owen Ullmann, a former AP reporter who now covers the White House for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, AP executives apparently would rather attribute stories of this nature to other news organizations than have their

own reporters get out front with them all alone. Ullmann says that when he worked in the AP's Washington bureau from 1977 to 1983 he detected a subtle discouragement, by management, of reporting that might seem overly critical of those in power, especially the president. By yielding such stories to others, he says, the AP avoided complaints from editors and publishers who might think the agency was going out of its way to attack the president.

Ullmann himself became embroiled in just such a situation. In 1981, Reagan's first year as president, he anonymously quoted high-level administration officials as saying that the president's budget would cause record deficits. One newspaper publisher, unhappy about the story, suggested that Ullmann's sources were really Democrats, possibly including the then House speaker, Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. They weren't. About that time, Ullmann says, he encountered resistance to other stories that quoted unnamed administration officials critical of some of the president's policies. Management, Ullmann recalls, subsequently banished anonymous critical quotes from the AP news report. Ullmann vainly protested that, since

by JIM SIBBISON



## Item: make documents work for you



CJR/Stuart Goldenberg

He cites an interview in which he asked Philadelphia Mayor W. Wilson Goode if he had bought tickets to a banquet for the Reverend Louis Farrakhan. Upon reading the quote back, Marimow says, he realized that Goode had not really answered his question, but had said only that a search of his records showed no record of such a purchase. Without the instant readback, Marimow says, he might not have spotted Goode's failure to respond directly until after the interview, when it might have been hard to get further comment.

Readbacks, Marimow believes, also "encourage the subject to be on the record because they suggest pretty strongly that the reporter wants to be fair, accurate, and thorough. It establishes rapport, even in a hostile interview situation."

Another Marimow technique for get-

ting sources on the record is to go to the other side. Last year Marimow was tipped that FBI bugs planted in the ceiling of a local roofers-union hall had picked up talk of union officials making cash payments to fourteen Philadelphia judges. Reluctant to hold off until the investigation became public, Marimow got several law enforcement sources to flesh out the story — off the record. "Once I got the law enforcement side of the equation," he says, "I went to the defense side — the judges, their defense lawyers — knowing that they had a rationalization for the payments and that in telling it to me they would, in effect, verify the law enforcement side."

One judge finally did go on the record, saying that what had taken place was nothing more than an exchange of family Christmas gifts. Eventually, Marimow got a number of non-law-enforcement sources to go on the record, because "once you get one person on the record you can usually get two or three because they are not afraid that they are out there all alone."

Persistence also paid off for Loretta Tofani, who persuaded first one and ultimately eleven of twelve men who had been raped during pre-trial incarceration at a jail in Prince George's County, Maryland, to tell their stories and have their names and photographs published in *The Washington Post* in 1982. Tofani has since moved on to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. One of her editors on the *Post* articles, Laura Sessions Stepp, says that, had Tofani not been able to identify the victims, her stories would probably not have brought about the reforms they did, including construction of a new jail, the hiring of more guards, and a change in jail management.

James McCartney of Knight-Ridder's Washington bureau is known for going to almost any length to identify sources in his stories. He is among the few reporters who have walked out of Washington background briefings rather than let administration policymakers plant unattributed and sometimes bellicose statements in the press.

Once, McCartney revealed the identity of the unnamed "high administration official" whose comments on foreign policy were regularly making the front pages of both *The New York Times*

critics in the government fear losing their jobs if they identify themselves, the ruling would effectively end AP coverage of criticism of the president within the administration.

AP management, backed by the news-media executives who sit on the agency's board of directors, insists that its policy is the only fair one. "Should we let high officials use our news columns to argue anonymously for their policies or to attack their political foes?" Louis D. Boccardi, then AP's executive vice president and now its president and general manager, asked AP members rhetorically at a meeting in Montreal in 1984. "I think not. . . ."

As for exclusives based on facts provided by anonymous sources, AP's executive editor, Walter Mears, says that his organization is by no means abandoning the field — it simply is determined to guard against the danger of a source being wrong. As evidence that the AP is not throwing in its hand, Mears notes that the agency nominated Robert Parry for a Pulitzer Prize for his exclusives — which relied heavily on anonymous sources — on Oliver North and the contra-aid network. "I'm really sorry he moved on," Mears says.

For his part, Parry says it's true that the contra stories he wrote himself and in collaboration with a partner, Brian

Barger, ultimately moved on the wire (see "Narco-terrorism, A Tale of Two Stories," *CJR*, September/October 1986). "But," he adds, "it was never easy." Both Mears and bureau chief Lewis often demanded additional sourcing, thereby subjecting copy to long delays, Parry says. One Parry-Barger exclusive on Oliver North's activities in the spring of 1986 was held up more than a month, he recalls, and went out only after Alphonso Chardy wrote a similar piece for *The Miami Herald*.

In the view of Keith Fuller, who was AP's president and general manager from 1976 until his retirement in 1985, the very nature of the news agency's mission is incompatible with the aggressive pursuit of politically charged stories based on anonymous sources. Individual newspapers, Fuller says, have a political viewpoint and are therefore free to publish stories that might be interpreted as partisan; the AP, by contrast, is neutral and must handle anonymously sourced copy "gingerly" or not at all.

The question remains, however, whether AP's policy on anonymous sources is really politically neutral, or whether it tips the balance toward reporting primarily what the administration — any administration — wants the public to hear.



and *The Washington Post*. The official was Henry Kissinger. If more news organizations were to follow McCartney's example and blow the cover on administration officials who won't allow their names to be attached to policy statements, the White House and the rest of official Washington might be forced to do more of its background briefing on the record.

Daily White House briefings, attended by dozens of reporters, are complete with official transcripts. But Saul Friedman of *Newsday* complains that perhaps 40 percent of the briefings are on background, with those reporters attending pledged to never name the briefers, even if they appear on network television the next morning. One result is institutional laziness, Friedman believes. "I know of no one in the White House press corps who refuses to use anonymous sources; I know lots of White House reporters who don't even try to get people on the record," he says.

In addition to these mass briefings by anonymous officials, small groups of reporters — selected because they work for important news organizations, or because of their perceived friendliness to the administration — are routinely invited to background briefings that can bring them front-page play or on-air prominence. Were one of the quality provincial papers, say *The Sacramento Bee* or the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, to publish a story identifying the unnamed source in a significant front-page *New York Times* story, does anyone doubt that the *Times* would report on this disclosure and, in effect, reveal its own source? A steady dose of this kind of watchdogging of anonymous-source stories would serve the public, and the credibility of journalism, quite well.

McCartney of Knight-Ridder properly emphasizes that anonymous sources "can be a good thing, because often the anonymous source is on the side of the public. I can think of no better example than the Pentagon Papers." In that case it was the documents themselves, not the leaker, which mattered. But his point — that those who blow the whistle are more deserving candidates for anonymity than policymakers — is valid. News organizations that use only on-the-record quotes run the risk of providing only the official version of events (see sidebar, page 56).

McCartney thinks that the widespread use of unnamed sources, to the detriment of vigorous inquiry, is due, in part, to the "immense pressure to produce fast," in part to "lethargy and laziness," and that the most prestigious news organizations help to create an atmosphere that encourages other news organs to make excessive use of unnamed sources.

"*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* play the unnamed sources game relentlessly — the *Post* uses more goddamned unnamed sources than just about anybody — but they don't get much out of it," McCartney says. "Far too often they use unnamed sources to let the administration spread its bullshit. *The Miami Herald* won a Pulitzer on how the contras were being financed in a story that used named sources."

Some reporters, McCartney says, "get some sense of self-importance" from citing anonymous sources: "I've seen reporters *not* use names when the sources were willing to be named because [the reporters] thought it added some cachet to their work."

Like McCartney, I have overheard colleagues virtually coach people into saying that they do not want to be named in stories. So has Bill Kovach, who, as Washington editor of *The New York Times*, overheard one of his reporters say to someone over the telephone, "I assume that's on background." Kovach, as recounted by David Shaw in *Press Watch*, lectured the reporter, then told his staff never to volunteer anonymity, to grant it only reluctantly. The *Times*, added Kovach, who is now editor of *The Atlanta Journal* and

*Constitution*, was not impressed by information gathered on background.

But, despite what editors say about their abhorrence of unnamed sources, they abound — in *The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald*, my own paper, in the newsweeklies, in small-town weeklies, in tough stories about misconduct, and even in life-style features.

So, for editors who want to do instead of just denounce, a suggestion: require reporters to identify for them every unnamed source, without exception. If the reporter who granted the privilege of partial or complete anonymity to a source feels that he or she may be risking a jail sentence to keep this pledge, then the editor, too, should assume that risk — or turn the editing over to someone with more fortitude. If an unnamed source must be used, then editors should insist on the most specific identification possible.

I might add, parenthetically, that, while I rarely use unnamed sources, I don't recall a single editor in the past decade having asked me to identify any that I did use. I have, though, gone to various editors and said that I wanted to disclose to them the identity of an unnamed source so the editor could make an independent judgment about whether to use that source. Merzer says that *Miami Herald* editors have, on a few occasions, asked him to identify unnamed sources, but it was his impression that the queries were triggered by personal curiosity rather than by journalistic concern.

Finally, the use of unnamed sources in many cases is a matter of economics, both for corporate management and individual journalists. It doesn't cost a news organization anything to allow a government official, whether he works in the White House or in city hall in Middle America, to whisper anonymously into a reporter's ear. To hunt down sources who will go on the record, as Marimow does by relentless pursuit of a story's other side, or to locate, read, and understand documents, takes time — and that costs money.

If publishers and broadcasters are truly concerned about their credibility, which is crucial to their long-term business interests, they had better start spending whatever it takes to stop the excessive use of unnamed sources. ■

## Government support of the commercial aircraft industry comes down to three issues: Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, and Airbus Industrie.

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According to the most recent figures available (Aerospace Industry Association, 1981), government funding—through the military and NASA—accounts for 72% of the \$12 billion spent on aerospace research and development.

For example, the same research and development teams who worked on the design for the Air Force's giant C-5 transport devoted their talents to jumbo commercial jets like the Boeing 747 and McDonnell Douglas DC-10.

Regulatory support, like the banning of Airbus jetliners from Washington National Airport until American companies built similar planes, helped protect American producers from competition.

The point is, government support—direct or indirect—of the aircraft industry is a reality. There's the American way and the European way, and both are perfectly acceptable. Because the aircraft industry is too vital, both in economic and technological terms, for government to ignore.

 **AIRBUS INDUSTRIE**

# Has the alternative press gone yuppie?

The conventional answer is yes.  
Our author offers an unconventional view  
by MARY ELLEN SCHOONMAKER

**T**he Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, pretty much the best of the alternative press, held its tenth annual convention in Portland, Maine, in July, and, always eager to avoid flying, I went up there from New York by Greyhound. There's nothing like eight hours on a bus at night to make you feel as if you've crossed a border of some kind: rattling along in the darkness with no bearings, the seediness of the Boston terminal at midnight, the high-speed voice of a girl in the last row at 2 A.M. telling her friend about the times she's been in jail.

I spent most of that night deep in a two-part story in *The New Yorker* about some black journalists in South Africa and the borders they cross every day — between the world of the white opposition paper they work for and the ravaged outlying townships that no other reporters dare enter. The author of the piece, William Finnegan, spent several weeks with Jon Qwelane, a highly respected reporter for the Johannesburg *Star*. Deaf in one ear from a brutal beating by two off-duty white policemen, Qwelane has become so skilled at eluding the authorities that he can “sniff a cop in a crowd of a thousand people.” Yet, while covering a police massacre in a township in the eastern Cape, he narrowly escaped being killed by a mob of angry blacks out looking for traitors.

The piece is about the dilemma these reporters wrestle with, how they reconcile their duties as journalists with “their powerful identification with the struggle for liberation.” But it seems to me that Qwelane, scribbling interviews on cigarette boxes, stuffing notes in his socks, exposing daily the lies of the authorities and the suffering and defiance

of his people, is more dangerous to the South African government than a small army.

So I arrived at the convention kind of hepped up, a little spacy from not much sleep and full of images of terror and heroism. The fifty papers that belong to the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies could loosely be called part of our opposition press, and I wanted to feel some of the same fire and see some of the same gutsiness that I had just read about. It looked as though I might be disappointed.

The walk the next morning from my hotel to convention headquarters at the Regency, a small brick armory on the Portland docks reborn as a luxury hotel, took me down narrow waterfront streets lined with boutiques with names like Serendipity, Amaryllis, and Once a Tree. The new high-tech and service economy that rose from the dying industrial Portland has produced a downtown that is white and very well-dressed, and so were the conventioners who gathered at the Portland Art Museum for the opening speeches and panels. I didn't see one black among the at least 150 people gathered at the museum; I did see a lot of people who looked as if they all bought their clothes at the same store: Benetton or The Limited or one of the other yuppie chains that feature those flowy cotton outfits. In fact, that's how I was dressed, and Anna Ginn, the stylish publisher of *Maine Times*, which was hosting the convention, came up and asked who I was. “I knew you were somebody,” she said. “You look alternative.” I recognized her from a clip I had just read about how well *Maine Times* is doing. Started in 1968, it was bought not too long ago by millionaire Dodge Morgan, the first American to sail nonstop around the world alone, and the paper's advertising department brags

that the *Times*'s average reader has an investment portfolio worth \$90,000, not including real estate. Peter Cox, a co-founder of *Maine Times*, said at the convention that morning that when he owned the paper, “we thought we were going to organize the blue-collar workers; we ended up with discretionary readers — people who make more money than the staff, including the editor and publisher.”

Most writers these days seem to jump to the same conclusion about the alternative press — that it's really become the mainstream yuppie press, cushy and comfortable and more interested in making money than in making waves — and, right about then, I was in mid-leap. Here was the publisher of *The Boston Phoenix* walking around with a Louis Vuitton-covered notebook and a gold watch that would knock your socks off, and here was somebody from *The Metro Times* in Detroit talking about how doing stories on the city's underclass really hurts distribution in the suburbs. And here was Thomas Winship, the ornery former editor of *The Boston Globe*, asking the assembled conventioners: “How often have you thought that you are just a bunch of over-age yuppies who have unknowingly been swept along by the Reaganesque cult of greed and are out of touch with your readers?”

**T**hat suggestion probably sent a small wave of anxiety rippling through the audience, not the part about being greedy — that was dismissed pretty quickly since quite a few alternative papers don't make much money — but the one about losing touch with readers. Since most alternative newspapers are free, their people worry a lot about demographics: who their readers are, how old they are, their likes and dislikes, their incomes. The keynote speaker at this convention was Ralph Whitehead, a journalism professor who has become a kind of demographic guru, popular in political circles for a phrase he coined to describe baby boomers who are not so upwardly mobile: new collars. Whitehead thinks political candidates,

Mary Ellen Schoonmaker is an associate editor of the Review.



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The biweekly Independent is published in Durham, North Carolina. The editorial staff, left to right: assistant editor Andrea Selch, associate editor Todd Oppenheimer, associate editor Barry Yeoman, assistant editor Kay Alexander, editor Katherine Fulton, and managing editor William Warner.

and alternative newspapers, should be aiming at new collars: they aren't as glamorous, but there are more of them.

But it's the upscale readers who bring in the ads and who give many of the papers that *New York*-magazine-wallowing-in-leisure look. The fattest ones are crammed with ads for restaurants, boutiques, health clubs, and tanning salons. There's nothing wrong with financial success; but is there a point when complacency starts seeping in, when a paper stops doing the stories that might make some of those readers or advertisers mad? Has any alternative paper questioned the headlong acquisitiveness of the eighties, for instance? "We are the prevailing culture," said one editor at the convention. "And I don't see it challenged at all."

But some editors are at least aware of the problem. Stephen Buel, editor of one of the thinner papers represented, *Spectrum*, published in Little Rock, Arkansas, said, "I hate demographics. It offends me, saying all my readers are rich and white. I really try studiously not to write for thirty-five-year-old male readers who drink Perrier." And Katherine Fulton, editor of *The Independent* in North Carolina, said, "Our feistiness gets us in trouble. Some advertisers stay away from us because they think we're too controversial." That doesn't deter her, however, from her goal of "informed, analytic, passionate journalism." (What a far cry from the blow-

dried management type I heard telling his listeners over lobster that he didn't see the need for any "messianic zeal" in his papers.)

I was beginning to feel better. And as I began to read some alternatives, at the convention and later at home, I found much to like. True, I had to wade through a lot of summer guides, and too many articles on barbecue and beachwear and how to steer clear of a sunburn. A few of the papers throw most of their efforts into their arts coverage, which can mean movies and rock music. And it's the rare alternative paper that can't use a samurai pencil editor. But almost all of them regularly run at least one major serious news story an issue. (Membership in the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies requires a commitment to news.) I liked the smooth, ruminating, *Atlantic* tone of *The Weekly* in Seattle, and there was a wonderful story in *Isthmus*, published in Madison, Wisconsin, about a tough ex-marine who lost his farm and began a fight to help other farmers, overcoming his hot temper and his prejudices to work with black farmers struggling in Mississippi.

I liked the intensity and political commitment of *L.A. Weekly*, relieved by touches of California flakiness: it introduced two new columns this summer, one that explores "various modern therapies, psychological techniques, and ideas connected with mental and spiritual well-being," and another offering

financial advice to readers interested in combining "sound money management with a responsible agenda." And I liked the lead of a column in *The New Paper*, published in Providence, Rhode Island, just because it made me laugh out loud: "While sitting around the house last Monday afternoon, daydreaming that somehow, someone would come forward with the photographs that you know must exist of Bork having sex with pigs during a Black Mass at Elliott Abrams' place, I was awakened from my reverie. . . ."

**A**lternative editors like to talk about things they can do that dailies can't; the above lead is a good example. But in this age of *USA Today* and the sad trend it has spawned toward shorter, shallower, happier stories, alternative papers have a more important role to play than ever before. A lot of dailies cater to people who don't have time, or don't want, to read, said Katherine Fulton of *The Independent*. "If you work for a daily, you're not allowed to think." Stories have to be so balanced, she said, that the life gets taken out of them: "In the best sense, it's a sign of responsibility; in the worst sense, of being chicken or greedy."

There is always some story that a daily is not covering — maybe the staff just can't get to it, or maybe it's too controversial or too much trouble to dig out — and an enterprising alternative paper can

almost come up with a scoop a week. *The Riverfront Times* in St. Louis published a cover story last June — “What’s \$650,000 Among Friends?” — that detailed how well over half a million dollars in tax money, 50 percent more than last year, was being spent to help pay for this year’s VP Fair, a huge local privately run event, with no strings attached. No one but the fair’s executive board of twelve corporate officials decides how the money is spent, and they do not report to the public. In a column in the same issue, editor and publisher Ray Hartmann called the donation “an incredibly chummy arrangement” and described the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which is one of the fair’s sponsors, as “an unofficial souvenir program” because of its coverage of the fair. Last year, Hartmann wrote, the *Post-Dispatch* ran thirty-five light stories about the fair and a twenty-page promotional section, no hard questions asked. This year, he says, his paper’s stories prompted the *Post-Dispatch* to take a closer look.

Three papers represented at the convention made me feel especially optimistic. In very different ways they all demonstrate seriousness of purpose, a devotion to news, and a relish for pointing out, carefully and accurately, when the emperor isn’t wearing any clothes. They aren’t strident or hip or trendy; they’ve gone beyond wondering how much longer they should be covering Jackson Browne. Maybe the right word for them is mature.

### The Independent

I had planned to spend most of the hour-long boat ride to an island off Portland, where the convention was hosting a lobster bake, interviewing Katherine Fulton. But, as it turned out, we spent a good part of that time just talking shop, everything from newspapers in London to (gulp) how the *Columbia Journalism Review* could be improved. Fulton is one of those people who truly has ink in her veins. Her grandfather was a newspaper publisher, and she talks about journalism with intelligence and affection. You can tell she thinks a lot about it, and the paper she edits reflects that.

*The Independent*, which is published every other week, has a circulation of 46,000, and covers what’s known as the

Research Triangle, a high-tech area that includes the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill and three major universities. It has an inviting southern feel — the in-brief section at the beginning of the paper is called The Front Porch. But it also has a spine of steel: solid investigative pieces, witty, incisive coverage of politics and state government, and a thoughtful, conversant air that reminds me a little of *The New York Review of Books*. Fulton says the paper was started with *The Texas Observer* as something of a role model. A former captain of the Harvard women’s varsity basketball team, Fulton was hired away in 1982 from her job as city editor of the *Greensboro Daily News* by *The Independent*’s founders, two graduates of nearby Duke University who felt a new kind of journalism was needed in the state.

Some of the paper’s recent stories were:

- A long piece by associate editor Todd Oppenheimer on discrepancies in the assessment of property values in Durham County that meant unintended tax breaks for owners of expensive homes. In a box with the story, Fulton wrote, “It’s difficult to imagine a more difficult, or less glamorous, assignment. But stories like this one — stories that hold people in power accountable for their actions — are just the kind we take the most pride in.” The piece won an award from Investigative Reporters and Editors.
- A long feature by William Warner on the people who work in McDonald’s and

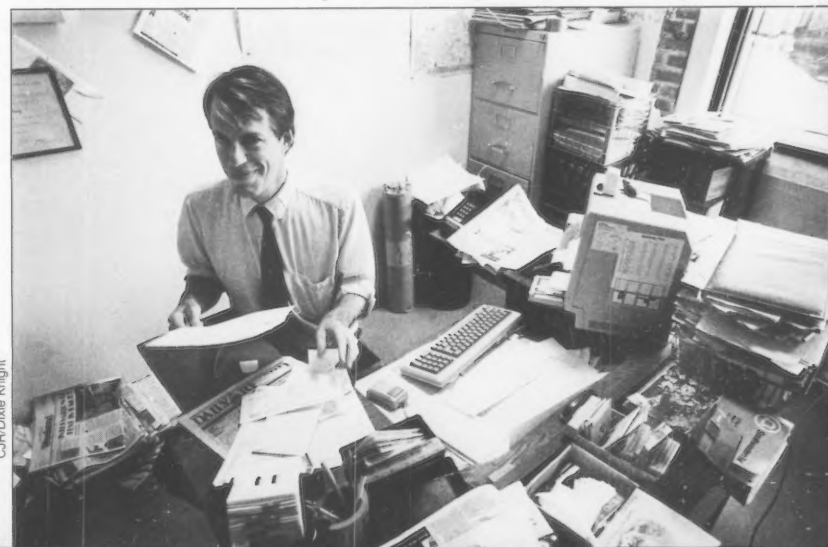
other fast-food restaurants that took a look at their hopes and dreams and the dreary conditions they work under.

• A piece pointing out that Governor James Martin had been almost completely absent from this year’s legislative session and silent about most of the issues the legislature was facing, so that even the leaders of his own party didn’t know what his legislative agenda was. The lawmakers at the time were hotly debating whether to name the collard or the sweet potato the state vegetable, and writer Barry Yeoman suggested that “nothing deserves to be named North Carolina’s state vegetable more than the governor himself.” The piece caused quite a stir and, not long after, this headline ran on the front page of the *Greensboro News & Record*: GOV. MARTIN DENIES CHARGE THAT HE’S THE STATE VEGETABLE.

### Spectrum

Almost all alternative papers start out struggling, but this one had a particularly hair-raising baptism by fire. The first issue appeared in Little Rock stores and restaurants in June 1985, and within forty-eight hours the paper had a major lawsuit on its hands. The front page had three stories on it, including one about a Bible-toting family that belonged to an Arkansas church led by the national chaplain of the Ku Klux Klan. It was a straightforward feature on the family and its white supremacist views, and a record store with an ad in the first issue sued *Spectrum* for \$40 million, claiming that

Stephen Buel, editor of Little Rock’s biweekly *Spectrum*



CJ/Olivia Knight



CJRM/Mark Thallman

George Thurlow edits the *Chico, California, News & Review*; the beard behind him belongs to Chico's founding father, General John Bidwell.

it had not represented itself as a Klan paper when soliciting the ad.

Editor Stephen Buel says that white supremacist groups were in the news at the time and that the paper had decided to take a look at one such family because "there hadn't been a story telling us why we hated these people." He says the suit was eventually "pretty much laughed out of court," but only after a "sustained effort to put us out of business."

In the two years since, *Spectrum* has looked at other racial issues, such as why the Little Rock Junior League has no black members and why a local festival, billed as "the greatest blues event in Arkansas history," had only five black groups out of eleven and seemed designed to draw a white audience.

I like *Spectrum* because it acknowl-

edges the black population of Little Rock in a direct way, writing for blacks as part of its audience, rather than just about their problems. (The paper put a black model on the cover for a fashion section inside.) And I like the fact that in each issue of the paper, which comes out every other week, at least three stories start on page one, a relief from the glitzy graphics and hopped-up headlines many other alternatives use on their covers. Buel is refreshingly candid about the paper's ups and downs, about how much better he'd like it to be. His heart is really in it, and he's undeterred by the fact that the most popular issue to date was the one whose cover featured Miss I-30 Speedway in a bathing suit.

One of the stories Buel is proudest of is the paper's 1986 investigative scoop on the wildly unrealistic projections of job growth in the state put out by the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission. The reporters, Jess Henderson and Jane Wood, checked out sixty-nine plants that the commission said would provide more than 10,000 new jobs, nearly half of which were found to be nonexistent. The *Arkansas Gazette* picked up on the story, Buel says, and it became big news.

Until this summer, when he hired his first full-time associate editor, Buel, a former daily reporter, was working sixteen-hour days and taking every other weekend off, doing all the assigning, editing, and copy editing, setting all the type, even selling some ads. The 20,000-circulation paper was profitable for awhile, he says, but it's "most definitely not profitable now." That's because the owners of *Spectrum* are plowing their surplus back into the paper, at least for the time being. "The thing to do is get in deeper," Buel says.

### Chico News & Review

According to *Playboy* magazine, Chico, California, is the home of the number one party school in the country, the local campus of California State University. But not all of the 65,000 citizens in the Chico urban area whoop it up every night. The northern California town is also home to one of the best alternative newspapers in the country, the *Chico News & Review*. And Chico being Chico — an oil-and-water mix of students, professors, rice farmers, ranchers, and

small-business people — is what makes the paper so unusual for an alternative, and so good.

In order to survive, says editor George Thurlow, the paper can't appeal just to yuppies — there aren't enough of them in town. So Thurlow has fashioned a weekly that people read, not because they are liberal or conservative, young or old, but because of what it tells them about their community, and it tells them a lot of things that the local daily doesn't. In fact, the ten-year-old *News & Review* has a higher circulation than the daily — 39,000 compared to about 28,000 — and it reads the way a small daily would if it were written entirely by op-ed writers. There's no neon writing, no hip humor, but lots of important, in-depth information about life in Chico, and that makes little Chico luckier than most of the rest of America: it's really a two-newspaper town.

"We don't want to be the daily," Thurlow says, referring to the *Chico Enterprise-Record*. "They're strong on obits, weather, police, gavel-to-gavel trials, and they cover all the meetings. We want to read their account of the planning commission meeting and instantly realize what they've missed — and then do a story people find more meaningful."

Thurlow says that he hired "the two best writers in town" away from the daily; he is also a very good reporter himself. In one issue last May he told readers in his column who was behind some local political dirty tricks, and he wrote five of six stories in a special section on farm subsidies. The lead story told how local rice farmers sign up their families and friends and equipment dealers, renting land to them so they can "farm" rice too and collect thousands of dollars in federal subsidies. In another issue, he took readers inside a few of the uninhabitable shanties that are nevertheless inhabited by the poorest of Chico's poor, and named the owners of the slums, some of them local businessmen. The box that ran with the story says a lot about the *News & Review* and about the readers it considers worth writing for: it was titled "How To Tell If Your Apartment Or House Is Substandard." And that doesn't mean not having a dishwasher. ■



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The Atomic Industrial Forum and the U.S. Committee for Energy Awareness have merged to become the U.S. Council for Energy Awareness. The new Council can provide even more information on energy matters including the peaceful uses of nuclear energy—particularly nuclear electricity. Call or write us for interviews with experts, trends in energy use, editorial roundtable requests, the latest technical and statistical data, public attitude data, and A.V. material (including stock footage).

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# A view from Washington



## THE NEXT BIG NUCLEAR POWER STORY

The development and use of nuclear electric power has been a major press story for three decades. That coverage was justified by the drama of mankind developing and successfully applying an energy source that was unknown only a few decades ago. The media have also covered each issue that has been raised — usually by critics — including "thermal pollution," reactor safety, economics and radioactive waste.

Most of these issues of concern have been proven insignificant, like "thermal pollution," or they are transient issues, like the economic and institutional problems that drove up the costs of new nuclear plants since the late 1970s. But the media and the public have not generally recognized another big nuclear power story — perhaps the most important of all — that may again be on the horizon: nuclear power's vital role in our historic evolution from petroleum to other energy sources that we control, and that are much less dangerous.

### Beyond the age of oil

Almost daily, events in the Persian Gulf are emphasizing truly serious dangers we face: the economic havoc and international violence that could result from our addiction to imported oil. Increased recognition of those dangers should make clearer the historic importance of nuclear power.

Since 1979 the use of oil by industrialized countries has dropped by over 6 million barrels a day. Significantly, more than 400 nuclear plants now operating in 26 countries are saving almost exactly that amount. Along with greater efficiency in energy use, the increased reliance on electricity generated in coal- and uranium-fueled power plants was a major force in the solution of the energy crises of the 1970s.

In the United States nuclear power has become our second largest source of electricity. More than 100 plants are licensed to operate in 32 states. Along with coal, they have supplied almost all of the additional electricity we have been consuming since the oil embargo of 1973 — an increase of almost 40 percent. And nuclear power has filled this need with a record for public safety and environmental protection not matched by any other major energy industry.

### The growing importance of nuclear power

Our existing nuclear power plants will continue to provide a substantial amount of our electricity for at least the next several decades. As our electricity demand continues to grow — this past summer utilities across the country reported record electric usage they had not expected for years to come — we will need more new generating capacity. The only economical large-scale sources of electric power available will continue to be coal and nuclear energy.

Harold B. Finger  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
U.S. Council For Energy Awareness

And the American public seems to be counting on nuclear energy. As indicated by public attitude research, 80 percent believe nuclear energy will be important in meeting our electricity needs in the years ahead, and 77 percent believe our need for nuclear energy will grow.

Currently, though, the possibility of new nuclear plants in the United States — beyond those in operation and being built — is inhibited, especially by state and Federal regulation. To give nuclear power a chance to play its full role — along with other energy alternatives — the electric power industry is urging Federal regulators, state utility commissions and other institutions to remove their excessive obstacles.

And just as important, we in the industry are pledging to do our part.

### Dedication to excellence

We are proud of the extraordinary nuclear power record for public health and safety, which has resulted from our emphasis on protecting the public and the environment. But we realize that in spite of this outstanding record, not every U.S. nuclear plant has consistently met the high standards that we want to achieve. That's why the nuclear power industry has rededicated itself to excellence in all operations.

In the 1980s the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations, the National Academy for Nuclear Training and other national programs were established to conduct expert evaluations of power plants and to accredit operator training programs with regular recertification of operators. Those programs, along with other initiatives, should result in superior performance and even-greater public confidence in the ability of nuclear power to provide our needed electricity reliably.

We hope that this dedication to excellence demonstrates our recognition of the long-term need for additional electric power and for nuclear energy as one of its major sources. The industry is determined to do its part to assure that the next big story is about the contribution of nuclear power — not about the dangers of a future without it.



# BOOKS

## Childe *Herald* grows up

**The International Herald Tribune:  
The First Hundred Years**

by Charles L. Robertson  
Columbia University Press. 472 pp.  
\$35.00

by PIERS BRENDON

The subject of Charles Robertson's admirable newspaper biography is, as the title suggests, a hybrid without a home. It started life just a century ago as the European edition of James Gordon Bennett, Jr.'s *New York Herald*, designed chiefly for Americans in Paris. In 1980, after various ownerships and metamorphoses, it became the first worldwide newspaper, now selling around 200,000 copies in more than 160 countries. "*International Herald Tribune?*" said Art Buchwald, the paper's good genius. "By the time you finish pronouncing it you've missed your plane!" But once aloft you'll probably be offered it anyway, for the *IHT* literally conjures its readership out of the air. The in-flight journal of the globe-trotting classes, it has defied the axiom that a newspaper must have a clear identity based on a local — or at least a national — constituency.

In dealing with the paper's early years Robertson has been hampered by the fact that many of its records were burned during World War II to keep the occupants of the Paris building warm. So, relying on frequently mined sources, he has little new to tell us about that prototypical press magnate, the mad, bad Bennett. The drunken sprees, exile as a result of urinating into his fiancée's fireplace (or grand piano), the establishing of a Paris paper aimed at rich, bored Americans

abroad like himself — all this is covered in familiar fashion.

Much in Bennett's career suggests that he was simply a megalomaniac playboy: the arbitrary hirings and firings, the sudden impulses (like bringing out the *Herald* in blue, then green, red, and purple ink), the obstinate vagaries (like printing the same letter, by the famous Old Philadelphia Lady, in his correspondence columns for almost two decades). Yet these were the fads of a journalist of genius, a man of mercury in every sense. As Robertson shows, Bennett was a pioneer of the latest techniques, from transatlantic cables to a motorized distribution system. He was a master of campaigns, competitions, and stunts. His obsession with the weather reflected the preoccupations of traveling Americans, as did his interest in gossip from the spas (WOEFUL DEARTH OF GENTLEMEN AT AIX-LES-BAINS) and his pungent political comment (THE THIRD TERMER'S SENILE SOCIALISM).

Not that the *Herald* was consistently right-wing: like Bennett himself, it was too perverse to be consistently anything. Robertson says that the paper opposed the prevailing anti-Semitism of the age, but he does not quote its proprietor on Joseph Pulitzer, whom Bennett denounced, according to Theodore Dreiser, as "an upstart Jew whose nose was in every putrescent dunghill rutting out filth for the consumption of the dregs of society." Convinced that journalism was just a species of prostitution, and compliant to French political pressures — like his successors, Bennett was always aware that the paper was a guest in a foreign country — he nevertheless refused to print the usual commercial puffs. A heady mix of seriousness and frivolity, of cosmopolitanism and Americanism, of amateurishness and professionalism, the *Herald* succeeded because of its very unpredictability. It

was a monstrous caprice, infused with Bennett's unrepentant diablerie, not to mention many millions of his dollars.

After his death in 1918 the paper barely survived the characteristic attentions of Frank Munsey before being acquired by the Reid family. Unfortunately, the Reids retained Munsey's man Laurence Hills, who, though possessing a certain journalistic flair, had about as much understanding of an editor's higher duties as Munsey himself. The result was that the *Herald* sank to its moral nadir during the interwar years, aping the corrupt French newspapers of the day. The anti-Semitic Hills admired Mussolini, whose signed photograph apparently graced his office for a time, and he recommended "Fascism for America." Under his editorship the *Herald* achieved the remarkable feat of outflanking Colonel McCormick from the right. Surprisingly, the Paris edition of the Colonel's *Chicago Tribune* was not only more liberal than the *Herald* (which swallowed it in 1934), but also more intellectual and bohemian. Hills once expostulated, "Do you know what those madmen at the *Tribune* have done now? They've used the word 'bordello' in a headline!"

Actually, Robertson somewhat exaggerates the differences between the Paris editions of the *Herald* and the *Tribune*, both of which were chiefly devoted to social froth. And Robertson protests too much in defending Hills as a typical product of his age. It is true that his bosses in New York largely supported him. As one said, not to censor Walter Lippmann and Dorothy Thompson "would probably result in barring the *Herald* from Germany and perhaps Italy." Furthermore, appeasement was by no means only a European aberration, as Hills showed when he printed the State Department's bizarre explanation of why it had not sent Hitler greetings

*Piers Brendon, author of The Life and Death of the Press Barons, lives in Cambridge, England.*



on his birthday in April 1940: it was not a German national holiday. All the same, Hills was singularly deferential to the dictators, evidently blaming British foreign minister Anthony Eden more than Hitler for Europe's troubles, though he fudged the issue by also trying to placate the French and to ensure that American visitors were not frightened away from Europe. In short, the *Herald* tried to be all things to all men, a venture as forlorn as Hills's final effort to keep reality at bay on the eve of World War II: DEAUVILLE REMAINS ANIMATED DESPITE DEPARTURES.

Despite difficulties, the post-war *Herald Tribune* quickly regained its old verve. (Witness its welcome to the bikini in 1946: GARB GETS FULL COVERAGE, WHICH IS MORE THAN CAN BE SAID FOR

THE WEARER.) But, thanks partly to serious financial mismanagement, it lost money for most of the 1950s and 60s. There was much penny-pinching: reporters wrote in their overcoats because the heating was turned down and Art Buchwald once smashed all the rickety chairs in the office and piled them in a heap so that the management would have to replace them. Management retaliated by suppressing some of his views on McCarthy and making him take down a poster of Stalin, whose hand grasped a pasted-on bottle of Coca-Cola.

Its new liberal bias notwithstanding, the paper raised advertising revenue via blatantly promotional supplements and relied heavily on official subsidies from the American government, acknowledging in return that it had "certain diplo-

matic functions." Not until it became the *International Herald Tribune* in 1967, with the participation of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, did the paper really look secure. True, it was still vulnerable to political intimidation by de Gaulle. But it managed to solve the many problems of the 1970s (such as newsprint price rises and air traffic controllers' strikes) and to take advantage of the technology of the eighties (such as VDTs and facsimile satellite printing) with an expertise that Bennett would have admired. Nevertheless, computer-dominated, boardroom-controlled, and located nowhere in particular, the *IHT* surely lacks the terrific vitality and immediacy that Bennett injected into the *Herald*.

Moreover, even now the paper faces a fundamental question, one which is at the heart of Robertson's book, though it is never satisfactorily formulated, let alone answered. This question, which rattles down the paper's first hundred years, concerns its identity. Is it a travel journal, a financial sheet, or a general newspaper? How can it maintain a distinct and independent character when it has no geographical focus and when the circulation-department tail wags the editorial-department dog? Who is it aimed at — the global village, the English-speaking peoples abroad, expatriate Americans? One features editor defined the *IHT* as "an international newspaper edited for Europeans with an American bias," a statement whose syntactical ambiguity speaks volumes about the paper's conceptual uncertainty. Perhaps the perennial identity crisis cannot be resolved. If it cannot, however sophisticated the paper becomes technically it will continue to be what it has been for most of its life — a more or less inspired muddle.

Robertson is better at anecdote than analysis, his bibliography is sparse, and he omits the full academic apparatus. But he tells an important journalistic story with vigor, thoroughness, and accuracy. And in the process he brings out some wonderful period detail. Particularly striking in the wake of Chernobyl is a 1920s *Herald* advertisement for Bad Gastein: "the world's most radioactive thermal baths."



James Gordon Bennett, Jr., as *Vanity Fair* saw him in 1887, contemplating the Paris edition of his New York Herald.

## BOOKS

### Organ music

**Pravda:**  
**Inside the Soviet News Machine**  
 by Angus Roxburgh  
 George Braziller. 290 pp. \$19.95

by LARS-ERIK NELSON

*Pravda* (The Truth) begins each day with a fiction: just below the two portraits of Lenin that are part of its masthead, it says: "Founded by V. I. Lenin on 5 May 1912." Lenin was in Paris at the time, and the articles he mailed in from exile — his first one appeared in the thirteenth issue — were often cut by the editors or rejected. *Pravda's* version of events is not always reliable but providing factual information is not really its job.

Its most important functions are to mobilize the masses, at which it hardly

*Lars-Erik Nelson, a former translator for The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, was a Reuters correspondent in Moscow and is now Washington bureau chief of the New York Daily News.*

succeeds, and to serve as a court of last resort — a kind of ombudsman to turn to when the political and government structures of the Soviet Union have failed.

Last May 18, for example, a paper-mill director, A. Skochilov, wrote to *Pravda* in despair. He had been notified by Gossnab, the Soviet state supply agency, that henceforth timber deliveries to his mill would be made only by train, rather than via the Kama River. The problem, Skochilov said, was that he had no facilities for unloading paper from trains. His mill, which produces one-fourth of all the newsprint and printing paper in the Soviet Union, would have to stop work. Why write to *Pravda*? He had no other hope of avoiding disaster. When all else fails, *Pravda* can sometimes be counted on to shame lethargic officials into taking action.

Angus Roxburgh's book is a drily witty, interesting, and brief — "thin" might be an unkind but more accurate word — history of *Pravda*, including an inside account of how it is put to bed each night and an appendix that offers



examples of its style of inquiry, exhortation, criticism, and ridicule. "There is no Western-style open-plan newsroom with clattering typewriters, telephones ringing, and sub-editors bustling around in shirtsleeves," Roxburgh reports. "The atmosphere is scholarly and calm. Any visitor to these offices instinctively understands why *Pravda* has so few misprints, why it takes so long to react to events, and why it is so predictable."

*Pravda* can occasionally be fascinating. One of the injustices of our adversarial reporting on the Soviet Union is that papers like *Pravda* are seldom given full credit for exposing the issues that become the raw material for Western

## PRIME TIME

### NEWS THAT MATTERS

*Television and  
American Opinion*

Shanto Iyengar and  
Donald R. Kinder



This strikingly original contribution to the study of public opinion, political psychology, and mass communication unequivocally identifies the ways in which television news orders priorities and affects how many Americans take part in political life.

"The most important work on media efforts in the political field since the classic research of the 1940s and '50s. Elegantly combining experimental and survey methods, it demonstrates what observers of the media have long suspected without knowing how to test: that if one looks for the right kind of effects, the impact of television on public opinion is profound."

—Daniel C. Hallin, author of *The "Uncensored War": Media and Vietnam*  
 \$19.95 cloth

## & PRESIDENTS

### THE SOUND OF LEADERSHIP

*Presidential Communication  
in the Modern Age*

Roderick P. Hart

Analyzing presidential public speeches from Truman to Reagan, Hart shows how, as they have been speaking more and more, presidents have been saying less and less.

"Roderick Hart's book very perceptively and convincingly points out that we have entered a new and possibly dangerous era where the sounds of presidential rhetoric are being mistaken for—maybe even replacing—presidential action. This is an important book for everyone who cares about the future of American politics."

—Lesley Stahl, CBS News.

"In the era of talking heads of government, Roderick Hart provides us with an arresting analysis of the uses, and misuses, of presidential speech."—Daniel Schorr, National Public Radio  
 Illus. \$39.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper

The University of Chicago Press 5801 Ellis Avenue, Chicago IL 60637

correspondents' reports. In its ombudsman's role, *Pravda* lets the outside world, as well as its Soviet audience, in on the grosser mistakes and follies of the Soviet system. To a large extent, when the West criticizes the Soviet Union, we are biting it with teeth it has given us.

All too often, though, *Pravda* reads like a vanity press for bureaucrats, with windy bombast, pathetic attempts to pretend that it is still a revolutionary agitator, and leaden, formula-written editorials on the need to do better. Roxburgh reveals the secret to scanning *Pravda* editorials: skim through the first few paragraphs of self-congratulation and look for the paragraph that begins "*Odnako*," meaning "However."

A problem is that the book — like *Pravda* itself — may soon be overtaken by events. Although the paper is officially the organ of the Communist party, which, in turn, is the vanguard of the working class, today's *Pravda* does not appear to be in the forefront of the revolutionary changes that Gorbachev has been trying to impose. To find out which direction the party leadership is taking,

Soviet readers snap up Yegor Yakovlev's *Moscow News*, or Vitaly Korotich's revitalized magazine, *Ogonyok*, Valentin Chikin's *Sovietskaya Rossia*, or the traditionally daring *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. *Pravda* seems stodgy by comparison, with its editorials on the need to increase the productivity of milkmaids, its full texts of meaningless communiques, its deadly headlines (IMPORTANT VICTORY OF BOLSHIEVISM, PUT AN END TO WASTE), and what Roxburgh aptly describes as its "court-circular" accounts of the comings and goings at the Kremlin.

**P***ravda's* front page, he writes, looks more like a "bulletin of royal proclamations than a newspaper. The names of party leaders are endlessly repeated with their full, long-winded titles; and proceedings at party plenums or sessions of the Supreme Soviet are chronicled in painstakingly superficial detail, with leaders present listed in alphabetical order and no indication of how the speeches were received or indeed of what was said by

any speaker other than the main one."

Roxburgh suggests that *Pravda* may have been burned last year by taking Gorbachev's *glasnost* too far. At a Communist party congress in February 1986, Yegor Ligachev, the Politburo's designated ideologist, criticized the newspaper after it had mentioned "for the only time ever in the Soviet press . . . the question of privileges enjoyed by the party elite and the resentment they cause in the general population." *Pravda* still retains Gorbachev's support, but, curiously, in publishing the texts of some of his more recent speeches the paper occasionally has omitted his sharp criticism of his opponents. This probably reflects Gorbachev's habit of departing from his prepared text rather than any overt censorship of the general secretary's remarks. Even so, it suggests that the organ of the vanguard of the working class is a couple of beats behind the conductor. A Soviet citizen had better pay attention to his television set or radio, because he can't count on *Pravda* to fill him in the next morning — let alone keep him ahead of the curve. ■

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# BRIEFINGS

by GLORIA COOPER

## Crime stories

**Crime Victims and the News Media**, a national symposium sponsored by Texas Christian University and the Gannett Foundation, 1986

As one teacher of journalists tells it, at least four reporters of his acquaintance have lied to their editors rather than pursue an interview with the grieving family of a murdered child. Still, such tenderheartedness is hardly the professional norm, as anyone who watches the news or reads the papers knows. And nobody, it seems, knows it better than the victims' families themselves, many of whom suffer further anguish at the hands of the press. In an effort to open a dialogue between crime victims and those who cover them, the journalism department at Texas Christian University, together with the Gannett Foundation, recently brought together representatives of both groups. The proceedings of the symposium, published in the form of a forty-page magazine underwritten by the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the Capital Cities/ABC Foundation, provide an illuminating synopsis of their exchange of views.

The field of discussion is littered with media horror stories: a viewer watching the late-night news and seeing her daughter's body being pulled from the scene of a drunk-driving crash; a woman terrorized by an abductor from whom she had escaped, after the local newspaper printed her name and address; a family learning, from a graphic segment on the evening news, that their missing daughter's skull had been found; a reporter publicly speculating on whether a kidnapped child had been raped; feature stories quoting from a murdered teenager's personal diary that reporters had obtained from police; a mourning mother hounded by reporters at her place of work. In the light of such experiences, the presentations by victims seem remarkably controlled. What they say they want from the press is factual, accurate reporting, the use of quotations in context, and routine notification of their right to be interviewed on the record, off the record — or not at all. What they would like the press *not* to do is include lurid details of the crime, use photos without

permission, and report embarrassing facts unless absolutely essential to the public safety.

The journalists, for their part, are far less defensive than one might expect. The tone is set by Roy Peter Clark, associate director of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida, and himself a victim, together with his family, of a traumatizing armed robbery at a vacation motel. Rejecting the sponsor's characterization of the conference as a debate between the victim's right to privacy and the public's right to know, Clark recasts the equation in more human, ethical terms: the journalist's inner conflict between the duty to comfort the afflicted and the duty to keep the public informed. The question, Clark contends, is not the legal "Can we publish?" but the ethical "Should we?" — and when care and compassion go into journalistic judgments (how and when to play a story, whether and where a photo should run) the conflict disappears. Picking up on this ethical theme, Edmund B. Lambeth, co-author of the recently published *Committed Journalism*, argues for the development of an explicit standard of vital public interest against which the privacy claims of various categories of persons could be measured.

Jeff Greenfield, media analyst for ABC News, takes a somewhat different tack. Reminding his audience that "crimes cannot be reported only in terms that will make a victim's family feel good," Greenfield observes that sometimes, as in the case of the recent murder of a New York prep school student in Central Park, in which coverage came to focus on the careless life-style of the city's fast-track parents, people need to be confronted with a story they do not want to hear. Indeed, in Greenfield's view, what the public needs is not less crime coverage, but more — not more of the blood-and-guts, sob-sister stuff, of course, but more reporting that would, say, draw middle-class attention to the shocking level of crime faced by the poor.

Meanwhile, Ernie Sotomayor, associate editor of *The Dallas Times Herald*, provocatively explores the institutional biases that inform the press's news judgment when it comes to crimes against victims who belong to certain socioeconomic, geographic, or ra-

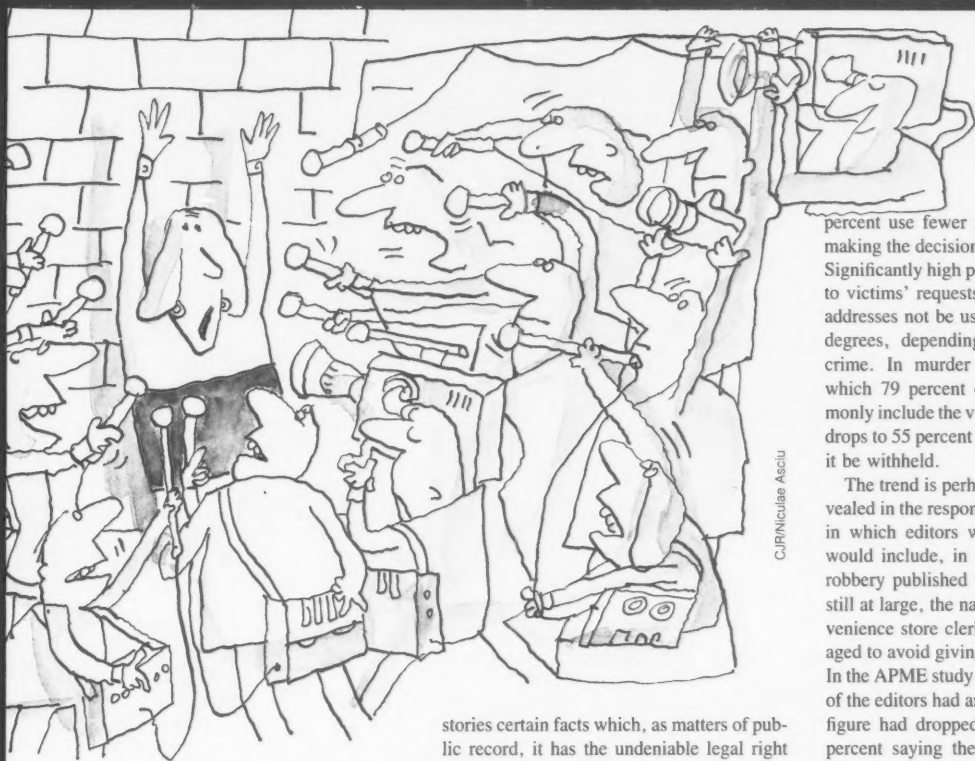


cial groups. Comparing local coverage of seven recent murders of whites and blacks of varying backgrounds, Sotomayor concludes that, despite some definite signs of progress — for example, the front-page coverage of the slaying of a prominent black couple, an event which not too long ago would probably have gone unmentioned in the Dallas mainstream press — prejudice is still a factor in deciding what is newsworthy.

Other presentations include a telling report by journalism professor Gerald Grotta, in which he details the results of a pilot study pointing up the differences between the public's attitudes and those of journalists on questions relating to the media's responsibilities in covering crime. While representatives of the public, for instance, were nearly unanimous in expressing a need for a voluntary press code aimed at reducing sensationalism, insensitivity, and misreporting, all of the journalists polled were flatly against it.

Perhaps the most practical contribution comes from David A. Anderson, a former journalist currently on the faculty of the University of Texas School of Law, who explains in plain English the rights that victims can claim. Drawing on specific cases, Anderson shows that victims who turn to the courts to obtain redress for the harmful effects of unwanted publicity can expect little help. A more effective course, he tells victims, is to know — and insist on — their rights: you don't have to give interviews, or even talk to the press on the phone; you don't have to allow reporters on your property,





CJR/Niculae Asciu

even if it's the scene of the crime; you can demand that police get you in and out of the police station so you don't have to face the photographers; you don't even have to prosecute, if you'd rather not.

Undoubtedly, worthy conferences like this one can help increase the press's responsiveness to the public's complaints, and, coming amidst so many earnest resolutions of greater compassion and care, Anderson's realistic talk may jar the idealistic soul. Still, until a victims' equivalent of Miranda comes along, it seems like pretty good advice.

**The Right to Know vs. the Right of Privacy**, by Rita Wolf, Tommy Thomason, and Paul LaRocque, *Journalism Quarterly*, Summer-Autumn, 1987

**A**mong the crimes against the public that, in the view of many citizens, the press commonly commits is the publication of a crime victim's or witness's name and address. Partly in response to the growing movement for victims' rights, partly out of fear of threatened legislation designed to protect those rights, and partly (one would hope) as the result of an occasional ethical twinge, the press in recent years has begun to examine its practice of including in crime

stories certain facts which, as matters of public record, it has the undeniable legal right to report — but whose publication may expose innocent persons to unwanted attention, place them in danger, or even cause them actual physical harm.

An early sign of this introspection appeared in 1976, when the professional standards committee of the Associated Press Managing Editors surveyed members' attitudes on privacy issues; a follow-up survey was conducted in 1983. Now, in the report at hand, a team of researchers, led by Rita Wolf of Texas Christian University, outlines the results of a detailed study of the same group of editors in 1985. Drawing on responses to a written questionnaire by 110 editors representing metropolitan, suburban, and rural papers of varying sizes from all geographic areas, the study assesses both the practices of the papers and the philosophy of their editors in making the tough, day-to-day choices between protecting individual privacy and telling the public what it has a right to know. Even more to the point, the current research, when taken together with the two previous APME reports, provides a solid basis on which to measure trends.

And the trends are certainly there. More than half the responding newspapers, for example, have changed their policies on identifying crime victims in the past five years. Almost 40 percent use fewer addresses, 20

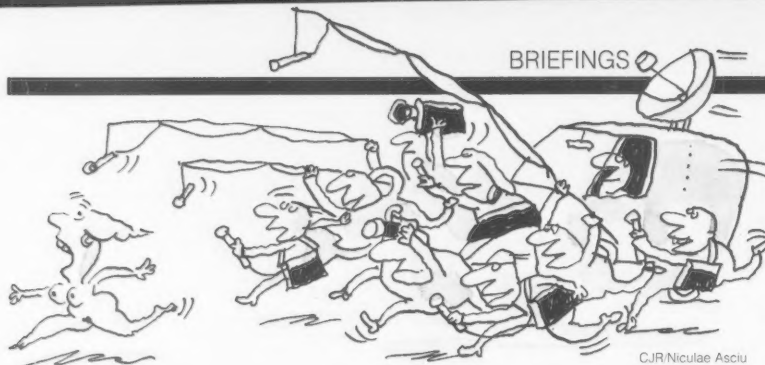
percent use fewer names, with almost half making the decision on a case-by-case basis. Significantly high percentages are responsive to victims' requests that their names and/or addresses not be used, although to differing degrees, depending on the nature of the crime. In murder cases, for instance, in which 79 percent of the respondents commonly include the victim's address, the figure drops to 55 percent if the family requests that it be withheld.

The trend is perhaps most dramatically revealed in the responses to a hypothetical case in which editors were asked whether they would include, in a report of an attempted robbery published while the criminals were still at large, the name and address of a convenience store clerk who had cleverly managed to avoid giving the robbers any money. In the APME study of 1976, some 48 percent of the editors had answered yes. By 1983 the figure had dropped to 23 percent, with 65 percent saying they would use the clerk's name only. In the current study, only 9 percent said they would include both the name and address of the clerk in their news story on the crime. (Forty-seven percent would identify the clerk by name; 40 percent said they would identify the victim only as a "clerk.")

Whether this trend serves the common good is a matter of debate. The Wolf team found that many editors — not surprisingly, those who tend to publish name and address and be damned — strongly believe that increased attention to the privacy rights of victims interferes with the public's right to know. Other editors — those more inclined in both theory and practice toward the notion of balancing responsibilities on a case-by-case basis — disagree. Most victims, however, it seems safe to say, would have little trouble choosing sides.

**News Coverage of Sexual Assault**, by Marilyn J. Musser and Carole Meade, Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Abuse, 1986

**I**n all sorts of ways, admirable and otherwise, the press's coverage of rape is markedly different from that of other violent crimes. The Wolf study cited above, for example, indicated that, in a hypothetical



CJR/Niculae Asciu

case involving sexual assault, some 90 percent of the responding editors would print neither the victim's name nor address. Such discretion, however, does not begin to address the complexities of reporting on what, in the eyes of many, is the ultimate violation a person can survive. This twenty-four-page resource guide, jointly prepared by a former reporter for *The Des Moines Register* and the director of the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Abuse, with the assistance of a committee of journalists, academics, and crisis counselors, is aimed at reporters and editors who want to do the right thing — but who may be a bit uncertain as to just what, exactly, that might be.

The guidelines begin with a brief review of the considerations to be weighed in de-

ciding whether or not to withhold a rape victim's name: on the one hand, the victim's need to be protected from further emotional trauma to herself and her family (the fear of which, not incidentally, leads many rape victims to choose not to report the crime to police); on the other hand, the opportunity for the news media to educate the public about the reality of rape, as well as to counteract the victim's sense of shame that is implicitly perpetuated by the perceived need to keep her identity secret. Although most victims of sexual assault still object to the reporting of their names, the authors note, it would be a mistake for a news organization to assume that this is invariably the case, for attitudes are undergoing change. Their best advice: ask the victim herself.

To that end, the guidelines point to the pivotal role that the local rape crisis center can play, not only as a supportive intermediary in arranging interviews with victims, but also as a source of facts and figures which, when taken together with official police reports, can provide a truer picture of the phenomenon of sexual assault. The authors also devote a special section to setting the record straight about a number of popularly held myths that have been known to creep into accounts filed by even the best-intentioned reporters, and they take special pains to explain why two facts in particular — what the victim was wearing and whether she resisted — have no place whatsoever in a news account of a rape.

More problematic is the authors' recommendation that, except in cases in which a sexual assault has resulted in death, the target of the attack should be referred to as a "survivor" rather than a "victim." While the logic of this notion, not to mention the likelihood of its acceptance by the press, is dubious at best, the impulse that prompts it is not. Even some small appreciation of that positive, healing impulse may help cut down those all-too-common stories that leave victims feeling they've been raped again — by the press.

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# UNFINISHED BUSINESS

## When small is beautiful

### TO THE REVIEW:

I knew there was a reason I subscribed to *CJR* after not subscribing for four years: your look at the small-town paper in Greenfield, Iowa, and its editor, Ed Sidey ("A Small-Town Paper Confronts the Farm Crisis," September/October), is it.

His problems and rewards are familiar to most of us owner/editors of small papers. Rarely is such good writing expended on a small paper by the big-city press. Thank you.

ROBERT A. HANSEN  
Publisher  
*The Hagerstown Exponent*  
Hagerstown, Ind.

## How free?

### TO THE REVIEW:

In "How Free Is The Press?" (*CJR*, September/October), James Boylan writes that "consternation" over the Supreme Court's decision in *Zurcher v. Stanford Daily* to permit police raids on newsrooms was relieved when Congress enacted a law near the end of the Carter administration. We know of no such sense of relief, and, if there was any, it was certainly unjustified.

Police are searching all sorts of people with privileged information, most of whom are non-suspects: attorneys, physicians, psychotherapists, health and welfare agencies, clergy — and, of course, the press. Our research shows that at least 150 of these raids have occurred since the Supreme Court's decision in 1978, even though a federal law, nine state statutes, and some state court decisions have sought to limit this practice.

The statistics for the press alone are frightening: state and federal agents have conducted some sixteen raids on journalists, news organizations, and their property since 1980; federal agents have performed seven searches or seizures since 1985. This is clearly an idea whose time has come, with agents from the FBI, the IRS, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service all showing who's the boss.

The law to which Boylan refers is the Privacy Protection Act of 1980, and apparently only one news organization has bothered to

sue under its provisions in seven years. Why the news media made such a howl after *Stanford Daily* and then fought for this act, only to fail afterward to seek its protection, has yet to be explained. With the exception of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, we know of no news media organization or association that makes a practice of reporting on these raids.

While journalists have kept their hands firmly over their eyes and ears on these Fourth Amendment abuses, federal judges have fortunately been quite awake to the Justice Department's violations of the Privacy Protection Act. As one circuit court of appeals put it, "In this case, the government proceeded as if [the act] and these [implementing] Department of Justice regulations were nonexistent."

EDWARD H. KOHN  
University City, Mo.  
DAN FIDUCCIA  
San Jose, Calif.

*Editors' note: Edward H. Kohn and Dan Fiduccia are former editors of The Stanford Daily, and Mr. Kohn was a respondent before the U.S. Supreme Court in Zurcher v. Stanford Daily. They are gathering research for the fourth edition of a comprehensive survey of third-party searches.*

### TO THE REVIEW:

James Boylan's review of press freedom seems to understate significantly the threat of prior restraint in this era of public and court hostility toward the press. The press comforts itself by pointing to the 1931 decision in *Near v. Minnesota* that declared prior restraints violate the First Amendment. However, as Fred Friendly pointed out in *Minnesota Rag*, it is likely that this close 5-4 decision against prior restraint would have been a 6-3 decision supporting the constitutionality of prior restraint by the government were it not for an unexpected death and a resignation that created two vacancies on the Supreme Court of the United States.

The Pentagon Papers case (*New York Times Company v. U.S.*) to which Boylan refers offers little comfort to a press seeking protection from government restrictions. In the opinions that accompany that 6-3 decision only Justice Black stated unequivocally that all prior restraints are unconstitutional. Jus-

tice Douglas's opinion left open the possibility of a wartime exception, and Justice Brennan made this exception explicit. Justice Stewart would have expanded the exception to include national defense and international diplomacy, while Justice White would have included material not in "the national interest" (whatever that is) as well. Justice Marshall would only conclude that prior restraint was improper in this specific case because Congress had not authorized it. Clearly, the members of this majority were anything but forceful supporters of freedom of the press.

More recent events provide no reassurance. If tomorrow the government decides to forbid publication of information about its wrongdoings on the ground of "national security," it is an open question whether the courts will say no. Public support for any protest by the press is unlikely. If the victims are not members of the mainstream media, it is quite possible that the establishment press will say nothing.

PETER E. KANE  
Churchville, N.Y.

## Those poets, those Timeses

### TO THE REVIEW:

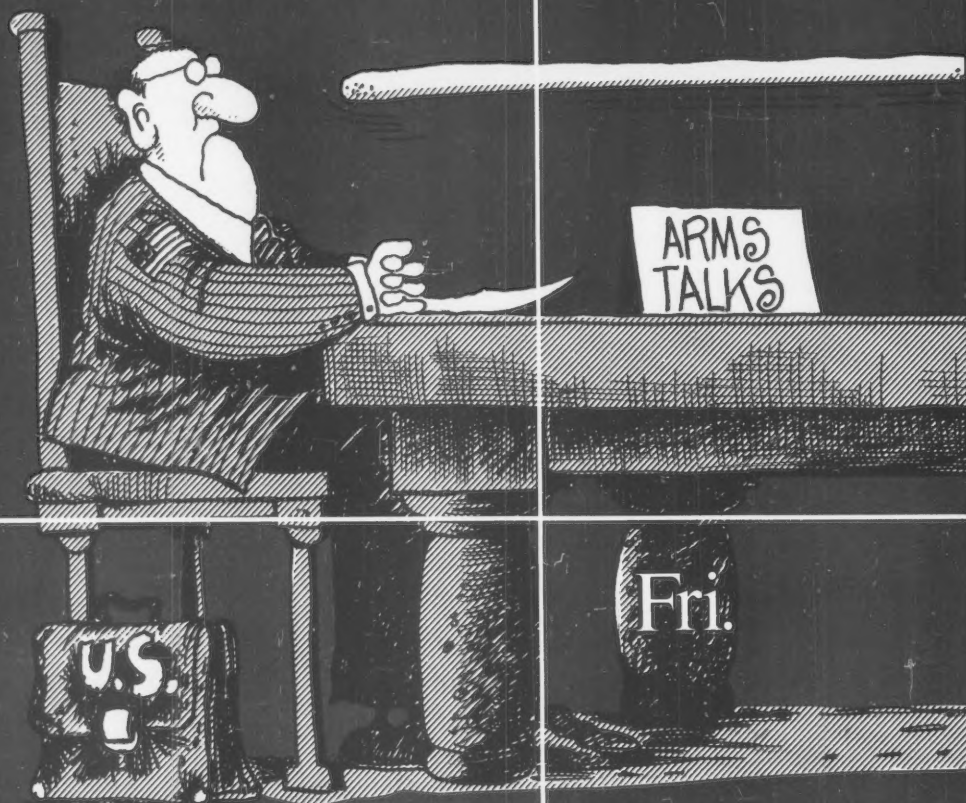
Sarah Arson's account of the recent poetry controversy in Los Angeles ("Why Poets Picketed the L.A. Times," *CJR*, September/October) was essentially accurate, but I should like to supplement her account with a few numbers.

From March 29, 1987, when the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* began printing a weekly poem and reducing the number of reviews of poetry collections, through August 30, 1987, the section published thirteen reviews of poetry books, two of which covered books of poetry criticism. During the same period, by my count, *The New York Times Book Review* published only eleven reviews of similar books. During the same period, however, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* also published twenty-seven poems.

Some old journalistic hands (I am a new hand myself) have told me that I could have spared myself this whole controversy had I simply made the change and said nothing about it. Readers pay so little attention to poetry, they imply, that no one would have

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## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

noticed. I am sure they are right: no one seems to have made much of how little *The New York Times* is doing.

JACK MILES  
Book editor  
*Los Angeles Times*  
Los Angeles, Calif.

### Daily News trial

TO THE REVIEW:

Re "The Trial of New York's *Daily News*" (CJR, July/August): When Jan Albert talked to me on the phone, I told her about a letter of resignation I wrote to Mike O'Neill in 1979. The previous year I had become the first black reporter assigned to the *Daily News*'s Albany bureau. In five single-spaced, typewritten pages I detailed numerous incidents of discriminatory treatment toward me during those twelve months, from stories being taken away from me, to being shut out of coverage of the gubernatorial campaign, to having my by-line dropped so many times I finally lost count.

O'Neill never responded to my letter. In reply to Albert's defense of O'Neill during our interview, I asked her: "If he cared so much about correcting racial injustice, how come he never even replied to my letter?" She said it was a good question. Not good enough to get in her article, however, and spoil her image of O'Neill as a tireless fighter against racism.

I now ask the question again, especially in light of Albert's sympathetic portrayal of O'Neill, her ready acceptance of the Al Campanis' theory of black lack of necessities as expressed by whites at the *Daily News*, and her obvious empathy with the viewpoint of those whites.

I also told her about Dick Oliver's killing of my stories and his attempt to remove my by-line from the last story I did for the *Daily News*. Again, not worth Albert's time, but statements in defense of Oliver were worth her time. Oliver, incidentally, never spoke to me during the fourteen months I was in Albany. He had the *News*'s operator make phone calls routinely to every other reporter assigned there during my tenure. Every time I answered the phone, however, Oliver would have the operator leave a message for one of the other reporters to call him back.

Some of the people at the *Daily News* were and are good and some of those good people are black, as hard as that fact is for so many white reporters and editors to accept. It's also interesting that Albert cast Jimmy Breslin in the role of spokesperson about racial matters for the *Daily News*, even though Breslin refused to talk to the plaintiffs' lawyers when

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## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

they were trying to prepare their case for trial.

CLINTON COX  
Ballston Spa, N.Y.

Jan Albert replies: *I regret that the information Clinton Cox gave me did not make the final copy of the piece. I did not omit his story because I considered it irrelevant or out of sympathy for Mike O'Neill. It was for a much less sinister and more mundane reason: I didn't have the space. In my first draft I based a whole section on our talk and called it "The Man Who Got Away," taking off from something Les Payne told me about the responses of black professionals to their treatment in the industry — that is, they fight back, withdraw, or get out of the business, as Cox elected to do. In the end, I cut it myself. It was not about the trial and that's what I was assigned to do: tell the story of the trial.*

*There was much in this complicated story that had to be alluded to in shorthand. There were black writers I spoke to at The New York Times and the New York Post who had even worse horror stories, which, like Cox, they shared with me at length, and which, to my deep disappointment, had to be cut. The many stories I heard from black reporters and editors about workaday racism at the*

*Daily News circa 1987 were reduced to one sentence saying that a number of black reporters and editors remain unhappy and unconvinced about improvement at the News as a result of the legal action.*

*I found Cox's allegations about Dick Oliver's behavior towards him potent and tried to confirm them, especially in light of Dave Hardy's experience with the same editor. I called Oliver no fewer than five times seeking comment and never got a call back. He told CJR's researcher that he didn't want to have anything to do with the article. I spoke with a reporter who Cox said could verify his claims about Oliver trying to kill his by-line and I got equivocation — not a black-and-white answer, but shades of gray, just like everything else in this story. Furthermore, I talked to black reporters who said they felt Oliver had treated them decently and white reporters who said he snubbed them. I didn't use their quotes in the finished article either, but in hindsight it seems to me that the article would have benefited from the inclusion of a sentence or two to the effect that a couple of other black reporters I spoke with echoed Hardy's difficulties with Oliver and attributed these difficulties to their race.*

*I would like to point out that I did use Cox's single strongest statement, that*

*"everyone who's ever worked at the News knows how damned racist it is."*

*I think the piece made it clear that being black did not exactly give a reporter a leg up on the competition at the Daily News — that it was, in fact, a palpable strike against a person. At the same time I did not present the protagonists as simply the victims of rampant racism. Frankly, I find it hard to believe that anyone reading my article could come away with the impression that I portrayed Michael O'Neill as "a tireless fighter against racism." What I said was that, up to a point, "he tried." It was obvious that, although his head may have been in the right place, he did not achieve true integration in the workplace, and to have had that verdict rendered in a public courtroom can not have been a happy experience for him.*

### The poverty watch

#### TO THE REVIEW:

We wish that, in the process of researching "The Poverty Story" (CJR, July/August), Michael Moss had found time to speak to Providence Journal-Bulletin reporter Carol McCabe, photographer Steve Haines, or any of the editors familiar with their series "Hunger in America." Such additional reporting

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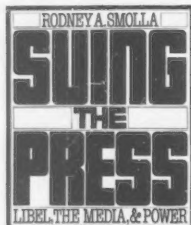
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might have produced a more accurate picture of that series than Moss presented.

We would like to correct several errors of fact or interpretation.

According to Moss, "McCabe wrote about Americans with 'holes in their walls' and 'holes in their souls.'" McCabe did not. Those phrases are extracted from an on-the-road sidebar written by photographer Haines.

Moss writes: "Indeed, her sympathy ran so deep that she regularly took groceries to the people she interviewed, which, unfortunately, impaired the credibility of her reporting, suggestive as her gifts were of a kind of checkbook journalism."

This passage, too, is based on Moss's interpretation of an on-the-road sidebar. It read: "When we visited hungry people, we tried not to arrive empty-handed." Such gifts were never given before an interview. The "visits" were subsequent to the first meeting. Often, in fact, food was brought for meals which McCabe and Haines had been invited to share.

Finally, Moss found the series disappointing because it failed to tell "exactly what, or why, or by whose hand and decisions" government food programs had gone wrong. He may have preferred a different story, but ours simply set out to learn whether hunger continued to exist in the U.S. in 1986 and to find out who the hungry were. "Hungry in America" covered several groups of people — from white farmers in South Dakota to the working poor in South Texas. For each group, causes and effects differed and each story in the series included relevant data.

JAMES V. WYMAN  
Deputy executive editor  
Journal-Bulletin  
Providence, R.I.

Michael Moss replies: *I wanted to — and tried to — interview Carol McCabe. When I called the paper, however, I was told that she was in Australia covering the America's Cup yacht races and thereafter would be headed to Southeast Asia for an extended tour. Unable to reach McCabe, I interviewed Charles Hauser, executive editor of the Journal-Bulletin. His familiarity with the series and with McCabe's work seemed to obviate any need to run down the editorial chain in the manner Mr. Wyman suggests.*

*The phrases "holes in their walls" and "holes in their souls" appeared in a sidebar by-lined jointly by McCabe and photographer Steve Haines. But the "voice" appeared to be McCabe's. One paragraph, for example, began with the words, "It reminded Steve . . ." and there was no parallel reference to "Carol."*

*I'm afraid that I still believe that the giving*

*of gifts, whether before, during, or after an interview, can affect both how the reporter sees the subject and how the subject reacts to the reporter.*

### TO THE REVIEW:

Thank you for running "The Poverty Story." Its appearance was, perhaps, especially heartening to those of us who write about poverty in places where awareness and advocacy are too often lacking. But what are we in this business for, if not to fight for the disadvantaged?

TOM KERTSCHER  
Social services reporter  
Tulsa World  
Tulsa, Okla.

### Shh: the VDT-radiation story

The *Review* has repeatedly — perhaps tediously — pointed out that the press seems extremely reluctant to cover the controversy over the potentially harmful effects of radiation emitted by video display terminals. This reluctance was once again highlighted when *VDT News*, a newsletter published in New York, issued a July 27 press advisory that began:

New experimental results from Uppsala, Sweden, support the claim that electromagnetic radiation from VDTs can cause biological effects. Last year's results from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm showed a similar effect. These two sets of data, taken together, add credibility to claims that VDT radiation presents a risk to pregnant women.

The only press pick-up we came across was in the August 13 issue of *New Scientist*, a British publication. We called Louis Slesin, the publisher of *VDT News*, to ask if he was aware of any pick-up in the U.S. press. "Yes," he said in mid-September, "a single item. A section-three story in *Newsday*."

### Correction

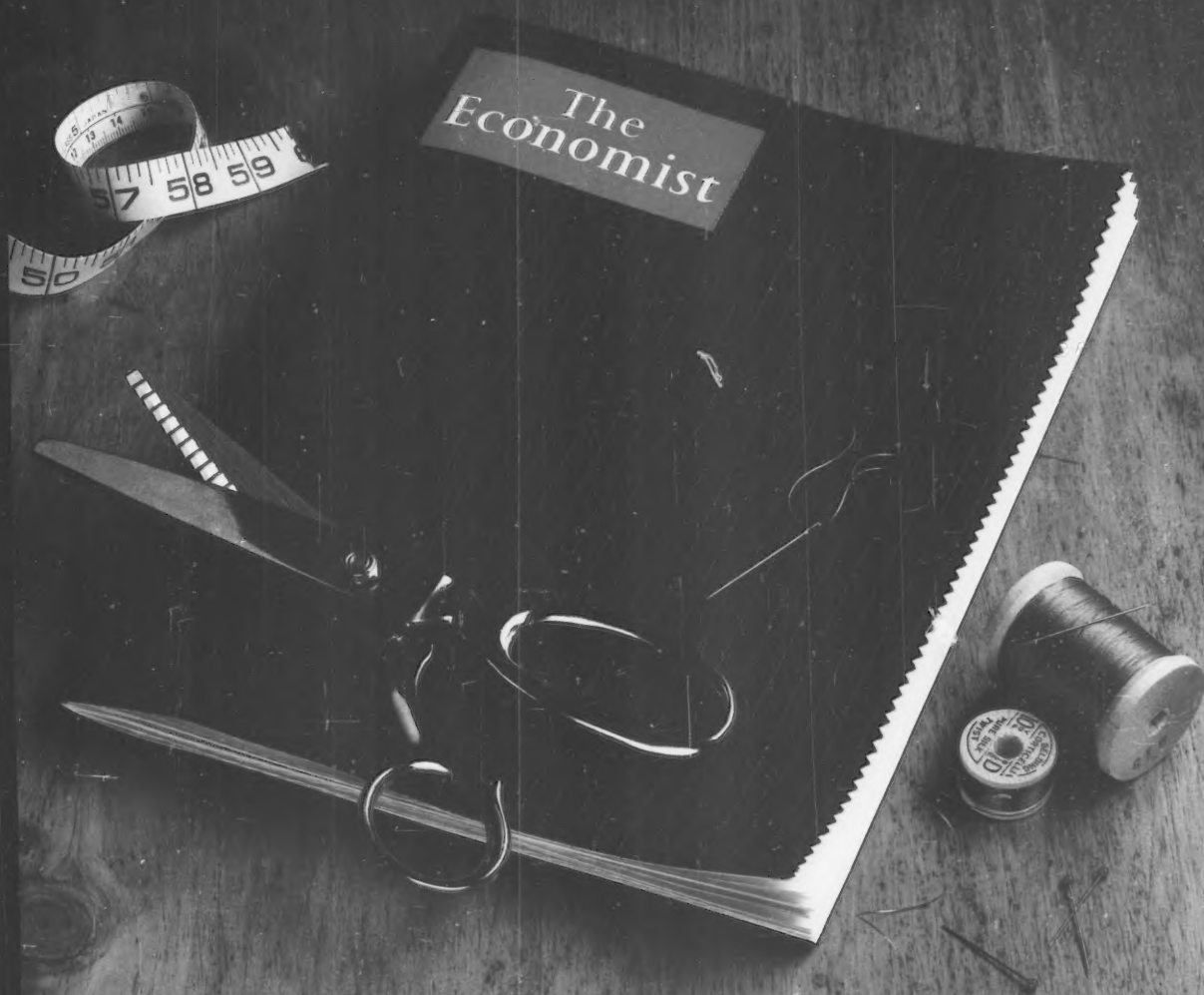
A photo used to illustrate Tina Rosenberg's "Letter from Chile" (CJR, September/October) purportedly showed Jorge Lavandero, president of the opposition daily *Fortín Mapocho*. In fact, the person shown in the photo was Felipe Pozo, the paper's director, or editor-in-chief.

### Deadline

The editors welcome letters from readers. To be considered for publication in the January/February issue, letters should be received by November 18. Letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.



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# How nuclear energy can help defuse the next oil crisis



**N**uclear-generated electricity, still the fastest-growing major energy source in America, may be our best defense against another oil crisis.

More and more energy experts are asking the same question: How long before another oil shock torpedoes our economy and threatens our national security?

## Oil turmoil

Signs of the next energy crisis:

- U.S. oil imports soared last year, costing the country \$27 billion. This year, America's foreign-oil bill is expected to grow even bigger.
- Many oil analysts are saying that in three years or less, as much as 50% of all the oil used in the U.S. will have to be imported. That's a higher percentage than we have ever imported before, even during the oil crises of the 1970s.

- A whopping two-thirds of the world's oil lies under the sands of OPEC nations.

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Nuclear electricity is a *domestically produced alternative to foreign oil*. Not just at the power plant, where nuclear energy is used instead of oil to generate electricity, but wherever Americans choose electricity (instead of oil) to heat their homes or run their factories.

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The more we use our own nuclear electricity, the less we'll have

to rely on energy from unstable regions of the world.

## Nuclear energy for a secure future

With over a hundred operating plants in the U.S., nuclear energy is now our second leading source of electricity. But in spite of all that we have accomplished, the threat of foreign oil dependence remains. Difficult choices still need to be made, but one fact is clear: the more we develop our own energy sources, the more we can control our own destiny.

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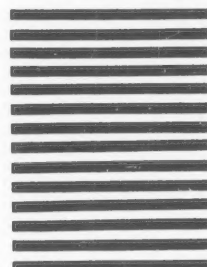
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# The Lower case

## Woman's unfaithful husband has had 'freedom' for years

Arizona Daily Star 7/21/85



## Reader requests tanning procedure for hunter's wife

Express-News (San Antonio, Tex.) 8/1/87

The degenerative manifestations of "old age" have included memory loss, disorientation, confusion, perceptual difficulties, speech loss, disorientation, confusion, perceptual difficulties, speech problems.

The Richmond (Ky.) Register 3/17/81

## Ground broken for grain suppository

The Aberdeen (Ida.) Times 8/12/87

Mark H. Furstenberg is a Washington writer who specializes in manufacturing issues.

The Washington Post 9/15/87

## Third Reich field goal nips Hawks

The Daily Iowan 8/31/87

### WHAT TOYS WILL SANTA BRING FOR ROVER?



Animaldom 12/86

## Bee smoking blamed in fire; 40 acres burn

The Daily Report, Ontario, Calif. 9/8/87

## Rock star hit with sick child

Mansfield, O., News Journal 8/4/87

## Officials to monitor games for mosquitoes

Journal and Courier (Lafayette, Ind.) 5/15/87

## AIDS to become a disease of heterosexuals, expert predicts

Seattle Post-Intelligencer 6/5/87 page 8

## No sign that AIDS is spreading rapidly among U.S. heterosexuals, expert says

Seattle Post-Intelligencer 6/5/87 page 9

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